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Military brass, behaving badly: Files detail a spate of misconduct dogging armed forces

By Craig Whitlock, Published: January 26 [E-mail the writer](#)

[Brig. Gen. Bryan T. Roberts](#) publicly warned his troops at Fort Jackson, S.C., last spring that he and the Army had “zero tolerance for sexual harassment and sexual assault.” Here’s what the Army didn’t tell the soldiers: At the time, Roberts himself was under investigation by the military over allegations that he physically assaulted one of his mistresses on multiple occasions.

Martin P. Schweitzer, a commander with the Army’s legendary 82nd Airborne Division, was respectful and polite when he met a female member of Congress to discuss matters at Fort Bragg, N.C. Afterward, however, he couldn’t resist tapping out e-mails to two other generals, describing the lawmaker, [Rep. Renee L. Ellmers](#) (R-N.C.), as “smoking hot” and jokingly referring to explicit sexual acts.

David C. Uhrich, a one-star Air Force general, kept a vodka bottle in his desk at Joint Base Langley-Eustis and repeatedly drank on duty, so much so that another officer told investigators that “if he did not have his alcohol, the wheels would come off,” according to the findings of an Air Force probe. The married Uhrich later sought treatment for a drinking problem, but not before he was also investigated for allegedly having an affair, something prohibited under military law.



Read excerpts from the reports on Roberts, Schweitzer and Uhrich involving accusations of affairs and alcohol use. [Go read.](#)

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The embarrassing episodes are described in previously undisclosed files of military investigations into personal misconduct by U.S. generals and admirals. Along with about two dozen other cases obtained by The Washington Post under the Freedom of Information Act, the investigations add to a litany of revelations about misbehaving brass that have dogged the Pentagon over the past 15 months and tarnished the reputation of U.S. military leadership.

[\[Read excerpts of reports on Roberts, Schweitzer and Uhrich\]](#)

Since November 2012, when an adulterous affair felled [David H. Petraeus](#), the CIA director and most renowned Army general of his generation, the armed forces have struggled to cope with tawdry disclosures about high-ranking commanders.

The Navy has been humbled by a spiraling [sex-and-bribery scandal](#), as well as a gambling incident involving [a three-star admiral](#) who authorities say they caught using counterfeit chips at a riverfront casino. The Air Force [relieved a nuclear commander](#) after investigators said he went on a drinking binge in Moscow. The Army [fired one general for allegedly groping a woman](#), forced another to retire after [he accepted expensive gifts from a foreigner](#), and demoted its top commander in Africa after an investigation found he [treated himself and his wife to a \\$750-a-night Caribbean hotel suite at taxpayer expense](#).

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The subject is painfully sensitive inside the Pentagon, where many generals and admirals say they are appalled but reluctant to openly criticize their peers.

“It’s just offensive when you see people do some of the things we’ve seen. It’s just completely offensive,” said an Army brigadier general who spoke on the condition of anonymity. “As officers, we ought to be held to a higher standard. Some of this stuff you’re seeing with folks is just completely unacceptable.”

[Martin L. Cook](#), a professor of military ethics at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I., said the recent eruption of misconduct is “frankly a puzzle to everybody.” One factor, he added, may be that as officers climb higher in the ranks they become insulated and fewer people are willing to challenge or question them.

In his ethics classes, Cook said, military leaders recognize “they’ve got a major trust problem with the American people. . . . They’re deeply ashamed of it. It’s horror. They say, ‘Oh, we can’t have that happening.’”

Frustration is rising all the way up the chain of command.

In late 2012, then-Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta [ordered a review of ethical standards for senior military officers](#). [Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey](#), the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, responded with a memo outlining several new training and evaluation programs for commanders and their staffs.

Since then, however, even more cases have come to light and consternation has continued to fester at the Pentagon.

On Dec. 12, [Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel](#) issued an unpublicized directive to Dempsey and the military chiefs, asking for another ethics review, this time of how the military teaches “core values and ethical leadership” to its officers. A response is due Feb. 14. “The secretary

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takes seriously all lapses and failures in leadership,” said Rear Adm. John F. Kirby, Hagel’s spokesman.

At the very top, the commander in chief has taken notice.

“President Obama expects the nation’s senior military leaders to demonstrate the highest standards of ethical conduct,” Caitlin Hayden, a White House spokeswoman, said in an e-mail. “The President has conveyed to the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that instances of senior general and flag officers not living up to these standards must be addressed effectively.”

The Defense Department and the armed services closely guard the results of their misconduct investigations involving generals and admirals. The Air Force stamps its reports “Sensitive Material” and “For Official Use Only” and affixes a warning: “Do Not Open Cover Without A Need To Know.”

The Washington Post filed Freedom of Information Act requests with the Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps for reports of inspector general investigations into senior official misconduct since Oct. 1, 2012. After a three-month review, which included an extra layer of checks from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the services released 30 partially redacted reports. A large majority concerned generals in the Army and Air Force.

Some of the probes involve relatively minor infractions of military regulations or policy. But the most common transgressions are related to sexual or personal misbehavior. In seven of the cases, investigators determined that generals had affairs or engaged in “inappropriate” relationships.

The Uniform Code

While the public may have become accustomed to stories of philandering politicians or ethical breaches by corporate leaders, such behavior is still considered intolerable inside the military, especially for generals and admirals who are expected to set a sterling example.

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The Uniform Code of Military Justice prohibits adultery or “improper” personal relationships, and officers can be prosecuted or disciplined for such offenses.

Just as significantly, however, military leaders are under intense scrutiny from Congress and the White House for how they respond to sexual assault or abuse in the ranks. Reports of such cases have escalated in recent years. Some lawmakers have tried to strip commanders of their authority to oversee those investigations, arguing that they lack legal training and are too often insensitive to the problem.

In the April 4 edition of the Fort Jackson Leader, a newspaper published for the South Carolina post where the Army conducts much of its basic training, Brig. Gen. Roberts let it be known where he stood on the issue.

“Team Jackson, let me be clear, the Army has zero tolerance for sexual harassment and sexual assault, and so do I,” Roberts wrote. “I view sexual harassment and assault as an enemy threat. . . . All of us have a shared role in ridding our ranks of this cancerous conduct.”

At the time, Roberts — the top commander at Fort Jackson — was under criminal investigation by the Army. Two months earlier, a woman filed a complaint alleging that she had been carrying on an affair with the married general for 18 months and that the relationship had turned violent on four occasions, according to an investigative report from the Army inspector general.

Most recently, the woman told investigators, the pair got into an argument in the general’s quarters after she inadvertently called his wife on her cellphone. The woman said she slapped the general; in turn, he “bit her lip,” and she suffered an eye injury. Although the woman said their sex was consensual, she added that she needed medical attention after two previous “physical altercations” with Roberts, according to the Army inspector general’s investigative report.

As Army investigators began making inquiries, they found a second woman, a subordinate civilian employee, who told them she, too, was involved in a consensual sexual relationship with Roberts.

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Roberts's phone records led investigators to a third woman, also a subordinate civilian employee. The records showed the two had called each other more than 900 times over six months, mostly at night or on weekends. That woman denied having a sexual relationship with Roberts, calling him a "boss and friend." When investigators asked why the general called her so often on weekends and at odd hours, she replied that "it could be to 'talk about motorcycles or work-related issues,'" according to the inspector general's report.

In May, the Army announced that it had suspended Roberts for allegedly having a physical altercation with a mistress, but it gave no other details. In July, the Army announced that the general had been relieved of his command position at Fort Jackson.

In August, after a closed disciplinary hearing, the Army found Roberts guilty of assaulting the first mistress on one occasion and committing adultery with her over a nine-month period. He was fined \$5,000 and issued a written reprimand but retained his rank as a one-star general.

Gary Myers, Roberts's attorney, said that he presented a case for self-defense in response to the assault charge but that it was rejected by the Army.

"This, like many cases, is far more complex than the documents would suggest," Myers said. The general, he added, "has expressed deep regret for the relationship with the woman and has accepted responsibility for that relationship."

In addition to the discipline imposed on Roberts for adultery and assault, the Army inspector general concluded that he had engaged in "inappropriate relationships" with the other two women and improperly used government e-mail and phones to communicate with them.

His attorney declined to comment on those findings but said the general's case "has absolutely nothing to do with sexual assault."

The Army said Roberts remains on active duty and is assigned to the Pentagon as a special assistant to the Army's vice chief of staff. The general will be "retiring soon," Myers said.

Lewd e-mails

Last summer, Army prosecutors were combing through the e-mail accounts of Brig. Gen. Jeffrey A. Sinclair, a commander facing [a court-martial on sexual assault, adultery and other charges](#), when they uncovered a raunchy exchange with two other generals.

The exchange started in March 2011, when Schweitzer, then a colonel and the deputy commander for operations for the 82nd Airborne Division, held a meeting with Ellmers, a newly elected House member whose district included Fort Bragg.

Schweitzer gave a pointed summary of the meeting in an e-mail to a superior, Maj. Gen. James Huggins, while copying Sinclair, then a fellow colonel and an 82nd Airborne commander.

“First — she is smoking hot,” Schweitzer wrote. “Second — briefing went well . . . she was engaging . . . had done her homework. She wants us to know she stands with us and will work/push to get the Fort Bragg family resourced.”

That, and what came next, led prosecutors to turn over the e-mail chain to the Army inspector general for a full investigation.

“He sucks :-) still needs to confirm hotness,” Sinclair teased in a reply.

More than an hour later, Schweitzer responded with an apology for the delay, saying he had masturbated “3 times over the past 2 hours” after the meeting with the congresswoman.

In releasing its investigative report in response to The Post’s Freedom of Information Act request, the Army censored the most offensive e-mail in its entirety, citing personal privacy interests. It also redacted Ellmers’s name and all references to her position as a member of

Congress.

The Post obtained an original, uncensored copy of the e-mails from another source.

In a statement released Friday, Ellmers called the e-mails “entirely inappropriate.” She said she was first told about them two weeks ago by Gen. John F. Campbell, the Army vice chief of staff, as officials were preparing to disclose the inspector general’s report to The Post.

“I am pleased with the corrective actions that are taking place and how they handled this very difficult situation,” Ellmers added.

Schweitzer, now a brigadier general who works at the Pentagon for the Joint Staff, did not respond to multiple requests for comment for this story.

Last summer, according to the report, he told Army investigators that his e-mails were “childish” and “truly stupid.” He also called himself “an honorable man,” adding: “I am not perfect. This horrible attempt at a joke was simply that, a horrible attempt at a joke.”

The Army inspector general concluded that Schweitzer had “failed to demonstrate exemplary conduct” and cited him for using his government e-mail account “for an unauthorized purpose.”

In response, the Army placed a “memorandum of concern” in Schweitzer’s personnel file. It is also holding his previously announced promotion to major general “in abeyance pending formal review,” according to Army spokesman George Wright.

Wright noted that inspector general probes are “administrative actions” and not criminal investigations. Speaking generally, he defended the level of discipline that the Army imposes in such cases, calling it “appropriate and commensurate with the level of the allegations.”

“It is serious, and it impacts these officers personally and professionally,” Wright said. “There never was any attempt to sweep anything under the rug.”

In the case of Uhrich, the married Air Force general who was reported for drinking vodka on duty and allegedly having an affair, several military officers and civilian employees who witnessed his behavior told investigators they were personally offended by it.

“It’s very unbecoming,” said an Air Force major, who like the other witnesses was not identified by name in the inspector general’s report. With “the stories that are coming out about General Officers and the things that they’re doing, I think it’s . . . not only bad timing but it’s very, uh, poor judgment.”

Added a male civilian employee: “Morally it’s wrong. I think legally it’s wrong. . . . I watch the news. Everybody watches the news. We see what happens to generals and to people who had this happen.”

A female civilian worker told investigators that she viewed Uhrich’s conduct as “messed up.” She added, “He is [supposed to be an] upstanding, high-ranking officer that represents the United States Air Force and that is uncalled for.”

The Air Force inspector general determined that Uhrich had engaged in an improper “romantic relationship” with the woman, a civilian who worked at a military base in Texas, and that he brought “discredit to himself” by repeatedly drinking on duty. An Air Force spokeswoman said he received “verbal counseling” as a result and remains on active duty.

Uhrich did not testify under oath or provide a statement to the Air Force inspector general. He declined to comment in response to a request placed through an Air Force spokeswoman.

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BarneyIWW wrote:

1/26/2014 11:35 PM EST

Part of the problem is that when something like this happens with a senior Field Grade or Flag Officer they are allowed to resign; while a Junior Troop would go to jail for the same offence. There is mindset with the senior Officer Corps that terminating someone's career is that same as being facing a Court Marital and being convicted. Its not!

BusyBody responds:

1/27/2014 10:16 AM EST



If you look at the actual numbers, there aren't so many flag officers committing crimes. When they do, however, it gets lots of coverage in the Washington Post.

Just for reference, the article directly above this is about a Congressman who was arrested for cocaine use.

I think we should hold military leaders accountable, but we shouldn't pretend like their problems are bigger just because it's the military.



BarneyIWW responds:
1/27/2014 11:18 AM EST

After 30 years as a Marine, with several Joint tours, the problem is that formal legal investigations and proceedings are almost never even started if a senior Officer is (or could be) involved. If anything official is even done, it's normally limited to a Inspector General administrative investigation and any action is administrative only and hidden under personnel privacy protections. The justification is almost always the same - "Not to Embarrass the Service."

Since they can't stop the Rumor Mill, what this does is undercut the credibility of the USMJ with the junior Troops; and enhances a sense of entitlement with the senior Officers. If Congress really wants insight into the scope of this problem they should look at historical IG records where only administrative action was taken, or find a way to quantify how often senior Officers have been told to retire for the good of the Service.

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