

DEOMI News Highlights

DEOMI News Highlights is a weekly compilation of published items and commentary with focus on equal opportunity, equal employment opportunity, diversity, culture, and human relations issues. The DEOMI News Highlights is also a management tool intended to serve the informational needs of equity professionals and senior DOD officials in the continuing assessment of defense policies, programs, and actions. Further reproduction or redistribution for private use or gain is subject to original copyright restrictions.

Women, minorities make gains in senior government jobs [Kellie Lunney, *Government Executive*, 13 June 2011]

- Women represented 31.2 percent of senior-level positions in fiscal 2010, up from 30.4 percent in fiscal 2009
- Minorities overall represented 33.8 percent of the federal workforce in fiscal 2010, an increase of 5 percent from the previous year
- The government employed more minorities than the national workforce in 2010
[Women, minorities make gains in senior government jobs](#)

Why do blacks receive fewer valor medals? [Leo Shane III, *Stars and Stripes*, 13 June 2011]

- Stars and Stripes runs an annual Heroes special section and there aren't a lot of black faces this year
- In the seven years they have been running the Heroes section, 21 black servicemembers and veterans have been included (they search for the heroes by scouring other newspapers and blogs)
- The Defense Department does not track racial data on valor awards
- Andre Sayles, director of the Army's Diversity Strategy and Integration office, said the decline in the proportion of African-Americans serving in combat roles has raised eyebrows within military circles. "If we are to maintain an all-volunteer army, we must consider all factors, to include any barriers that may impact lack of African-American service in the combat arms branches."

[Why do blacks receive fewer valor medals?](#)

A Scary Number – 3,000 Military Sexual Assaults [Sen. Claire McCaskill, U.S. Senator from Missouri, *HuffingtonPost.com*, 13 June 2011]

- Last year nearly 3,000 incidents of sexual assault were reported throughout the U.S. Armed Forces. Still, the Pentagon estimates that only 13 percent of sexual crimes were actually reported
- When Leon Panetta appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee for his confirmation hearing as the next secretary of defense, Senator McCaskill asked him to pledge vigilance in the fight against sexual assault in the military
- According to Senator McCaskill, a good step would be for the Senate to pass the Support for Survivors Act, a bill that provides victims of sexual assault with important information they need to seek justice, and ensures that all documentation, such as medical records, connected to a case of sexual assault is stored uniformly and sufficiently by the Department of Defense

[A Scary Number: 3,000 Military Sexual Assaults](#)

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Diversity

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On College Forms, a Question of Race, or Races, Can Perplex

By Susan Saulny and Jacques Steinberg

New York Times, June 13, 2011

HOUSTON — At the beginning of the college application season last fall, Natasha Scott, a high school senior of mixed racial heritage in Beltsville, Md., vented about a personal dilemma on College Confidential, the go-to electronic bulletin board for anonymous conversation about admissions.

“I just realized that my race is something I have to think about,” she wrote, describing herself as having an Asian mother and a black father. “It pains me to say this, but putting down black might help my admissions chances and putting down Asian might hurt it.” “My mother urges me to put down black to use AA” — African-American — “to get in to the colleges I’m applying to,” added Ms. Scott, who identified herself on the site as Clearbrooke. “I sort of want to do this but I’m wondering if this is morally right.” Within minutes, a commenter had responded, “You’re black. You should own it.” Someone else agreed, “Put black!!!!!!! Listen to your mom.”

No one advised marking Asian alone. But one commenter weighed in with advice that could just as well have come from any college across the country: “You can put both. You can put one. You’re not dishonest either way. Just put how you feel.” Until this year, questions about race on most college applications were much simpler. A student who was white with a distant American Indian ancestor, for instance, would most likely have identified himself as white.

But students can now choose from a menu of new boxes of racial and ethnic categories — because the Department of Education started requiring universities this past school year to comply with a broad federal edict to collect more information about race and ethnicity. The change has made it easier for students to claim a multiracial identity — highlighting those parts of their backgrounds they might want to bring to the fore and disregarding others, as Ms. Scott considered doing with her Asian heritage.

So the number of applicants who identify themselves as multiracial has mushroomed, adding another layer of anxiety, soul- (and family-tree-) searching and even gamesmanship to the process.

The new options have forced colleges to confront thorny questions, including how to account for various racial mixes in seeking diversity on campus. Is a student applying as black and Latino more desirable in terms of diversity than someone who is white and black? Or white and Vietnamese? Should the ethnicities of one’s distant relatives be considered fair game, or just parents? And what should be done about students who skip the race question altogether — a sizable number of whom, some studies have shown, are white, and do so either in protest or out of fear that identifying as merely white could hurt rather than help their chances in this new environment?

Some scholars worry that the growth in multiracial applicants could further erode the original intent of affirmative action, which is to help disadvantaged minorities. For example, families with one black parent and one white parent are on average more affluent than families with two black parents. When choosing between two such applicants, some universities might lean toward the multiracial student because he will need less financial aid while still counting toward affirmative-action goals.

“How do we include multiracials in our view of an egalitarian society and not do it in a way that disadvantages other groups?” said Ulli K. Ryder, visiting scholar at the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America at Brown University. In interviews, admissions officers at Rice, Stanford, Emory and Carleton, as well as other highly selective colleges and universities, said they were grappling with the imperative to give students greater freedom to describe their backgrounds

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/14/us/14admissions.html?ref=us>

while also being on the lookout for manipulation by those seeking to stretch their ties to particular races or ethnicities.

Those applicants well know that for decades, admissions offices have made it a priority to assemble a diverse student body, in part to redress the nation's long history of discrimination in higher education but also to provide students rich opportunities to learn from peers who bring various backgrounds to campus. The onus of determining racial makeup is almost entirely on the students; the colleges do not typically seek out guidance counselors or other adults in the students' lives for corroboration.

"You know kids are gaming the system every way they possibly can, from private counselors who write essays to massaging their statistics," said Scott White, a college counselor at Montclair High School in New Jersey. "It comes up all the time. If one grandparent is of Spanish heritage, should this kid be getting an admissions bump?"

One woman who posted on College Confidential wanted to know if her children's French great-grandfather, born in Algeria, would qualify her family as African-American. The consensus was no.

A Growing Category

Rice University in Houston might, given its early history, seem an unlikely place to find admissions officers wrestling with questions of race as they size up their applicants. A private and highly selective institution, it was founded in the early 1900s by a wealthy Houston businessman as an exclusively white institution, a designation it maintained through the late 1960s.

And yet these days, white students are now only 43 percent of the student body at Rice, where an applicant's racial identification can become an admissions game changer. This can be especially true during the "committee round" in early spring, when only a few dozen slots might remain for a freshman class expected to number about 1,000.

At that stage, a core group of five to seven bleary-eyed admissions officers will convene for debate around a rectangular laminate table strewn with coffee cups and half-eaten doughnuts as the applications of those students still under consideration are projected onto a 60-inch plasma TV screen.

For most of the nearly 14,000 who applied this year, the final decision — admit or deny — was a relatively straightforward one resolved early on, based on the admissions officers' sampling of factors like test scores, grades, extracurricular activities and recommendations.

But there are several thousand applicants whose fate might still be in limbo by the committee round because their qualifications can seem fairly indistinguishable from one another. This is when an applicant's race — or races — might tip the balance.

"From an academic standpoint, the qualifying records, the test scores, how many AP courses, they may all look alike," said Chris Muñoz, vice president for enrollment at Rice since 2006. "That's when we might go and say, „This kid has a Spanish surname. Let's see what he wrote about.“ Right or wrong, it can make a difference."

How much of a difference — and whether more or less weight should be given to that student based on how many boxes were checked — is hardly clear, either at Rice or at dozens of other selective institutions.

And yet, at Rice, the chances that a multiracial applicant might be admitted have climbed over the last five years to 23 percent this year. (By contrast, the admission rate for the freshman class as a whole this year was about 19 percent.)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/14/us/14admissions.html?ref=us>

Adding to the confusion in admissions offices is that there is no standard definition, in higher education or elsewhere, of what it means to be mixed race. But the hundreds of colleges, including Rice, that accept the Common Application have allowed students to mark more than one box for several years now.

Over the last five years, the number of applicants to Rice who characterize themselves as of more than one race has skyrocketed to 564 from 8. Multiracial students now account for about 6 percent of the freshman class at Rice, nearly as many as those who identify themselves as “black or African-American.” (Nationally, about 3 percent of Americans identify themselves as mixed-race.)

The new federal requirements have freed some students from having to pay short shrift to some aspects of who they are, and have forced changes in how the colleges see them as well. But like Rice, some colleges had already gotten there on their own.

Before Emory University in Atlanta upgraded its computer system about a decade ago, if an applicant signaled that he or she was African-American and white, or African-American and Asian, someone in the admissions office would make the judgment call that the student was African-American because there were no set guidelines on how to define an applicant’s race. “We had to pick one,” Jean Jordan, the dean of admission, said. “I’d say it was pretty arbitrary.” Actually, it may not have been so arbitrary. Emory, like other colleges, was acting at least in part to ensure a sizable African-American student population, which the college’s leaders consider an institutional priority. Now, about 5 percent of its freshman class is considered mixed-race.

At Carleton College in Minnesota, there were, until recently, clear protocols intended to address the issues with which Emory was wrestling: students who signaled on their application that they were black, Hispanic and white, for example, were considered black; American Indian and white, then they were American Indian. Now, such students would be among the nearly 9 percent of the freshman class at Carleton who are multiracial.

Within the System

Mr. Muñoz, who is ultimately responsible for Rice’s effort to promote diversity on campus, says he has been guided by the template of his own mixed-race family. He is Mexican-American, the first in his family to go to college, while his wife is of Irish descent. They have three grown children. “I am honoring, best I can, how the students see themselves,” Mr. Muñoz said. “If they say they’re mixed, I’m not going to say, „Oh no, you’re black.“ I’m going to say, „You’re mixed.“ Isn’t that O.K.?” And, he added, “We’re not out to play „gotcha.“ In all things there is an element of trust.” Still, he acknowledges, such questions give applicants (and their families) wide latitude.

An applicant’s final determination of what to say about race is often made in consultation with a college counselor. Many counselors will convey to families that a multiracial applicant — like one who is black and Chinese — often has a better chance of being admitted to a highly selective college than those in any other racial or ethnic category.

When asked for advice by an applicant weighing whether to identify as multiracial, Mr. White, the counselor from New Jersey, said, “I just say, „Answer the question honestly: What do you consider yourself?“ ”

“If a kid is unsure,” he added, “I say check multiple boxes. If they’re Caucasian and African-American, I’d let them know that it would probably be beneficial to put yourself down as African-American or multiracial.” “I’d be giving them information, not saying, „Do this,“ wink, wink.”

Still, Rice knows that however much it emphasizes that students should be guided by the honor principle in making such calls, some will seek to stretch the new definitions to their own gain.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/14/us/14admissions.html?ref=us>

“There are players out there,” said Julie Browning, the longtime dean of undergraduate admission at Rice.

Mindful of that, Rice admissions officials try to reconcile whatever boxes an applicant may have checked with the rest of the application. For example, in its customized supplement to the Common Application, Rice asks an essay question about “the unique life experiences and cultural traditions” that a student might bring. “If they care about their cultural heritage, it comes through,” Ms. Browning said. “If they’re lukewarm about it, and they’re trying to make it something they care about, it comes through.”

The subject of affirmative action is a personal one for Tamara Siler, the coordinator of minority recruitment in the Rice admissions office, who is black and who graduated from Rice in 1985. She said that her grandparents and aunt had wanted to attend Rice, but could not because of its history of segregation. Ms. Siler said she realized that some students being admitted to Rice as multiracial would probably not fit the original definitions of affirmative action, but that students who categorize themselves as multiracial bring a valuable and unique perspective to campus. “At some point I have to say we can’t fix society’s ills,” she said. “That’s not our job as an institution.”

This past spring, at least four applicants to Rice checked the box for nearly every ethnicity and race. “For the most part,” Ms. Siler said, “whenever someone does all those boxes, we say, ‘Yeah, yeah, but how do you really live your life?’”

But in the case of two of those applicants — a young woman from Hawaii who checked the boxes for Native Hawaiian, Asian-American and white, as well as a Californian who said she was white (Irish and German), black and affiliated with two American Indian tribes — Ms. Siler became convinced that the descriptions were accurate.

The Hawaiian student wrote her essay “partly in her native language” and “talked in detail about her other heritages as well,” Ms. Siler said. The Californian “discussed the influence of these various cultures on her family traditions, especially related to holidays.” “Both students,” Ms. Siler said, “were admitted to Rice.”

When Mr. Muñoz was asked if, within the multiracial pool, there is a hierarchy of sorts for getting an edge in the admissions process, he took a long pause. “That’s hard,” he said.

“Not in an intentional way, but it’s just the reality. I don’t sit with my group and say, O.K., Japanese-American is going to be treated this way, African-American-Hispanic is going to be treated this way,” he said. “It’s part of, what’s the story? How underrepresented is this group on campus?”

“At any point in time,” he concluded, “the given weights of what you’d consider to be important change.”

At her magnet school in Maryland, Natasha Scott, the student who posted about applying as Asian or black on the Web site College Confidential, typically identified as both races. On her applications, however, she ultimately chose to mark only one box: black.

“I think that when you’re a stressed out high school senior, you’ll do anything that’s legal to get into college,” said Ms. Scott, 16, who will be attending the University of Virginia. “I must admit that I felt a little guilty only putting black because I was purposely denying a part of myself in order to look like a more appealing college candidate.”

But, she continued, “In any case, I think it’s up to the individual.”

<http://ebird.osd.mil/ebfiles/e20110616826184.html> or
http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/16/opinion/16kristof.html?_r=1&hp

Our Lefty Military

By **Nicholas D. Kristof**

New York Times, June 16, 2011

As we search for paths out of America's economic crisis, many suggest business as a paradigm for cutting costs. According to my back-of-the-envelope math, top C.E.O.'s earn as much as \$1 a second around the clock, partly by cutting medical benefits for employees. So they must be paragons of efficiency, right?

Actually, I'm not so sure. The business sector is dazzlingly productive, but it also periodically blows up our financial system. Yet if we seek another model, one that emphasizes universal health care and educational opportunity, one that seeks to curb income inequality, we don't have to turn to Sweden. Rather, look to the United States military.

You see, when our armed forces are not firing missiles, they live by an astonishingly liberal ethos — and it works. The military helped lead the way in racial desegregation, and even today it does more to provide equal opportunity to working-class families — especially to blacks — than just about any social program. It has been an escalator of social mobility in American society because it invests in soldiers and gives them skills and opportunities.

The United States armed forces knit together whites, blacks, Asians and Hispanics from diverse backgrounds, invests in their education and training, provides them with excellent health care and child care. And it does all this with minimal income gaps: A senior general earns about 10 times what a private makes, while, by my calculation, C.E.O.'s at major companies earn about 300 times as much as those cleaning their offices. That's right: the military ethos can sound pretty lefty.

"It's the purest application of socialism there is," Wesley Clark, the retired four-star general and former supreme allied commander of NATO forces in Europe, told me. And he was only partly joking.

"It's a really fair system, and a lot of thought has been put into it, and people respond to it really well," he added. The country can learn from that sense of mission, he said, from that emphasis on long-term strategic thinking.

The military is innately hierarchical, yet it nurtures a camaraderie in part because the military looks after its employees. This is a rare enclave of single-payer universal health care, and it continues with a veterans' health care system that has much lower costs than the American system as a whole.

Perhaps the most impressive achievement of the American military isn't its aircraft carriers, stunning as they are. Rather, it's the military day care system for working parents.

While one of America's greatest failings is underinvestment in early childhood education (which seems to be one of the best ways to break cycles of poverty from replicating), the military manages to provide superb child care. The cost depends on family income and starts at \$44 per week.

"I absolutely think it's a model," said Linda K. Smith, executive director of the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, which advocates for better child care in America. Ms. Smith, who used to oversee the military day care system before she retired from the Defense Department, said that the military sees child care as a strategic necessity to maintain military readiness and to retain highly trained officers.

<http://ebird.osd.mil/ebfiles/e20110616826184.html> or
http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/16/opinion/16kristof.html?_r=1&hp

One of the things I admire most about the military is the way it invests in educating and training its people. Its universities — the military academies — are excellent, and it has R.O.T.C. programs at other campuses around the country. Many soldiers get medical training, law degrees, or Ph.D.'s while in service, sometimes at the country's finest universities.

Then there are the Army War College, the Naval War College and the Air War College, giving top officers a mid-career intellectual and leadership boost before resuming their careers. It's common to hear bromides about investing in human capital, but the military actually shows that it believes that.

Partly as a result, it manages to retain first-rate officers who could earn far higher salaries in the private sector. And while the ethic of business is often "Gimme," the military inculcates an ideal of public service that runs deep. In Afghanistan, for example, soldiers sometimes dig into their own pockets to help provide supplies for local schools.

Granted, it may seem odd to seek a model of compassion in an organization whose mission involves killing people. It's also true that the military remains often unwelcoming to gays and lesbians and is conflicted about women as well. And, of course, the opportunities for working-class Americans are mingled with danger.

But as we as a country grope for new directions in a difficult economic environment, the tendency has been to move toward a corporatist model that sees investments in people as woolly-minded sentimentalism or as unaffordable luxuries. That's not the only model out there.

So as the United States armed forces try to pull Iraqi and Afghan societies into the 21st century, maybe they could do the same for America's.

Hoo-ah!

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/16/us/16baptist.html?ref=us>

Southern Baptists Approve Steps Aimed at Diversity

By ERIK ECKHOLM

New York Times, June 15, 2011

With the election of a black pastor to a senior position this week and a new action plan to increase ethnic diversity in its leadership, the Southern Baptist Convention has taken its most concrete steps yet to overcome a history of racial exclusion and to broaden its appeal in a changing American population. Fred Luter Jr., the widely admired pastor of a largely black church in New Orleans, was elected first vice president of the Convention at its annual conference in Phoenix on Tuesday, the highest position yet held by an African-American. Church leaders said Mr. Luter was the overwhelming favorite to be elected president at the assembly next year.

“It’s a historic development for the Southern Baptist Convention and a sign of its future, if it’s going to reflect America,” said R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., referring to Mr. Luter’s rise to prominence. Beyond the symbolism, the president controls appointments to key governing committees.

With 16 million members, the Convention is the country’s largest Protestant denomination, but the numbers are dwindling. Its traditional constituency is aging, and recruitment has not kept pace with the country’s demography. Church leaders say that as the population becomes more diverse, they must act more aggressively to draw in minority churches and followers. At the meeting this week, Bryant Wright, a pastor from Marietta, Ga., was elected to his second one-year term as the president of the convention. By custom, he is to step down next June.

The Southern Baptist Convention was established in 1845 after a break with Northern churches over their opposition to slavery. Until the late 20th century it was a defiantly white institution, often promoting segregation. “About 30 years ago we were virtually all white — by intention, sadly, but true,” said Richard Land, head of the Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission in Washington, in a phone interview from Phoenix. In a landmark resolution in 1995, the Convention issued a public apology for its past racism and opposition to civil rights laws.

Since then, the number of black, Hispanic and Asian affiliates has grown and now account for 19 percent of the denomination’s churches. In reports prepared for the Phoenix assembly, Convention leaders acknowledged that minorities in leadership had lagged well behind even the growth of minority members. The meeting adopted sweeping corrective measures, including requiring its various bodies to report annually on the role of ethnic churches and leaders and calling on the Convention president to “give special attention to appointing individuals who represent the diversity within the convention, and particularly ethnic diversity” in committee appointments.

Church leaders insisted that the plan was not the same as governmental affirmative action policies, which many of them have opposed. The Convention plan does not involve quotas, and no one will be put in a leadership position who is not fully qualified, officials said. A few delegates in Phoenix argued that the church should remain color-blind as it pursues its primary purpose of spreading the Gospel, but nearly all the more than 2,000 voting delegates supported the diversity plan.

“Leadership has to emerge naturally, but we bear a moral responsibility to encourage development of multiethnic leaders,” Mr. Mohler said in a phone interview. Gay and lesbian advocates on Wednesday called on the Southern Baptists to apologize for antihomosexual policies and for what they called destructive efforts to “cure” people of homosexuality.

Mr. Mohler said that in contrast to racial issues, the church view that homosexual behavior is a sin is dictated by the Bible. “We cannot compromise without disobeying the Scriptures,” he said, adding that it is also an article of faith that the Holy Spirit can transform people.

Women, minorities make gains in senior government jobs

By Kellie Lunney

Government Executive, 13 June 2011

The number of women and minorities in senior-level jobs increased in fiscal 2010, according to a [new report](#) from the Office of Personnel Management.

Women represented 31.2 percent of senior-level positions in fiscal 2010, up from 30.4 percent in fiscal 2009; blacks made up 6.7 percent of the top government jobs in 2010, an increase from 6.4 percent in 2009. The proportion of women and minorities in General Schedule grades 13 through 15 increased by 7.9 percent and 9.4 percent, respectively. Overall, though, the number of women employed last year dropped slightly from 2009, from 44.2 percent to 43.9 percent.

The report could not specifically account for the increase in women and minorities at the upper-end of the pay scale but said one reason could be the transition back from pay-for-performance systems (i.e., the Defense Department's National Security Personnel System) to the General Schedule, which in some cases resulted in higher classifications.

Minorities overall represented 33.8 percent of the federal workforce in fiscal 2010, an increase of 5 percent from the previous year. The government also employed more minorities than the national workforce in 2010: blacks accounted for 17.7 of the federal workforce; Hispanics, 8.0 percent; Asian/Pacific Islanders, 5.6 percent; American Indians/Alaska natives, 1.8 percent; and non-Hispanics/multiracials, 0.7 percent. The national labor force employed slightly more women, white workers, and non-Hispanic/multiracial employees than did the federal workforce, but the greatest disparity related to Hispanic hires. Hispanics made up 13.6 percent of employees nationwide in 2010, compared to 8.0 percent of the federal workforce in both 2009 and 2010. The number of Hispanics serving in senior-level government jobs, though, did rise slightly during that time period, from 4 percent to 4.1 percent.

Al Gallegos, national president of the National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives, said the small increase in Hispanics at the top tier of government is "really insignificant," though he added that he had not extensively analyzed the data in OPM's report. "I think there is a lot of work that still needs to be done as far as underrepresentation of Hispanics in federal government, especially at the executive level," he wrote in an email. Gallegos said he is working with OPM on the Hispanic Federal Employment Council, and hopes "something positive will come out of it in terms of ideas on how to increase representation and addressing some of these barriers." The council's next meeting is June 17.

In a message accompanying the report, OPM Director John Berry emphasized the federal government's efforts to recruit and retain a diverse workforce, including veterans and employees with disabilities. President Obama in 2009 and 2010 issued executive orders aimed at increasing the number of vets and people with disabilities hired by the government.

Whites still comprised the majority of the national labor force in fiscal 2010, at 70.4 percent.

Why do blacks receive fewer valor medals?

BY Leo Shane III

Stars and Stripes, 13 June 2011

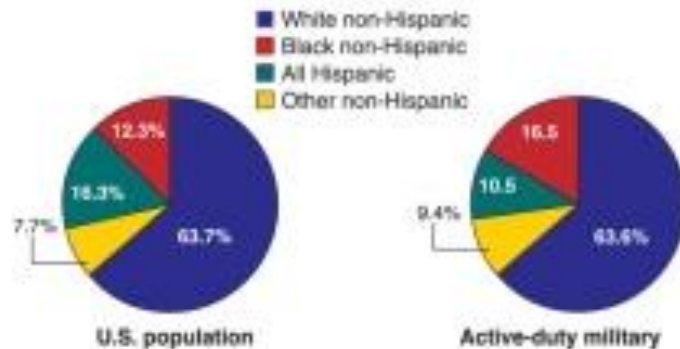
WASHINGTON — There aren't a lot of black faces in this year's Heroes special section. Unfortunately, that's not a surprise.

Every year, we try to present a diverse selection of battlefield stories, to best reflect the makeup of the military. We seek representatives from each of the services. And we want to make sure that every hero we feature isn't a white male.

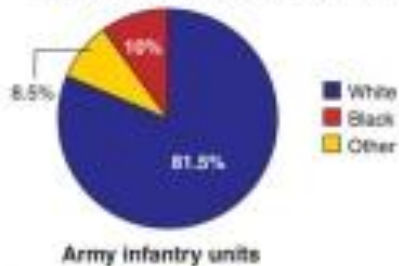
And, in most respects, this section succeeds in that. We rarely have to search for Hispanic troops to profile. We've had trouble finding women, but that's not unexpected given the Defense Department's prohibition against women in combat.

Race on the battlefield

African Americans are slightly overrepresented in the military, compared to the U.S. as a whole ...



... but underrepresented on the battlefield.



SOURCES: U.S. Census data, Defense Manpower Data Center; Defense Department Personnel and Procurement Statistics; Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute

Stars and Stripes

But finding African-Americans who have received valor awards has often been difficult. It has meant scouring other newspapers and blogs looking specifically for black heroes. It has meant tactless last-minute calls to public affairs officers asking for help identifying troops with heroic stories, but they have to be black.”

Since we began publishing the Heroes special section seven years ago, we have included profiles of 21 black servicemembers and veterans — just over 10 percent of the total stories.

This year, we tried to figure out if there's a reason why those stories of extraordinary heroism by African American troops seem hard for us to find.

The Defense Department does not track racial data on valor awards, and has no central database of all

the troops who have received those honors. So there is no empirical way to determine whether black servicemembers receive proportionally fewer valor awards than their counterparts.

But broad demographic shifts in the military over the last decade suggest that one of the main reasons we've seen fewer battlefield awards for African-Americans is because there are fewer African-Americans on the battlefield.

According to figures from the Defense Manpower Data Center, today there are more than 241,000 African-American active-duty troops in the four services, and nearly 130,000 more in the Guard and Reserve.

<http://www.stripes.com/news/special-reports/heroes/heroes-2011/why-do-blacks-receive-fewer-valor-medals-1.146508>

But those numbers have dropped significantly in recent years. In 2000, one out of every four soldiers was African-American. In 2010, it was less than one in five. The Marine Corps saw the proportion of blacks drop from nearly 16 percent to about 10 percent over the same span.

Moreover, even fewer blacks are serving in front-line positions, in the kind of combat units where most valor awards are earned.

In 1994, blacks comprised nearly 25 percent of all Army infantry units. By 2009, that figure had dropped to 10 percent. Today, there are four times more blacks serving in administrative or supply positions in the Army than in infantry posts, according to service statistics. Marine Corps statistics show similar trends.

“That doesn’t surprise me at all,” said Edwin Dorn, an assistant secretary of defense in the 1990s and now a professor of public policy at the University of Texas. “That’s in line with trends we’ve seen in the past. In an ideal world, you’d like the distribution of [racial] groups to be close to the rest of the military, but that’s the ideal.”

Why are fewer African-Americans electing to serve in combat units? Dorn said it’s a combination of factors, most pointing toward why many African-Americans are drawn to the military in the first place.

“Some of it has to do with racial trends in society,” he said. “[African-Americans] join the military because they see it as a place they can get a leg up, with more opportunity than the civilian economy. So they think about it as a career, or think about the kind of jobs that can translate into a civilian job later on.”

That means gravitating to administrative jobs that provide a long-term career track or are easier to translate into resume-friendly job skills.

John Sibley Butler, author of several books on race in the military, said the overall decline in the number of blacks in the military is not unexpected, given that college enrollments among African-Americans have increased in the last 20 years. That has brought the military’s racial composition closer to the country at large.

There’s also a long-held perception inside the black community that more minorities were forced to the front lines during the Vietnam War than their white counterparts, Butler noted.

African-Americans comprised roughly a third of Army combat infantry ranks during that conflict, according to Butler’s research. Thus, parents who have encouraged their children to join the military in the last 20 years have also pushed them to seek jobs outside of combat specialties.

“So, while Vietnam was fought disproportionately by blacks,” Butler said, today’s wars “are being fought disproportionately by whites.”

In fact, only about 9 percent of the troops killed in Iraq and Afghanistan have been black, even though they make up more than 17 percent of the total active-duty force. In contrast, Hispanics make up roughly 10 percent of the active-duty force and 10 percent of the deaths from the current wars.

Andre Sayles, director of the Army’s Diversity Strategy and Integration office, said the decline in the proportion of African-Americans serving in combat roles has raised eyebrows within military circles. Numerous service-wide studies – including a recent report from the Military Leadership Diversity Commission – have noted the falling combat numbers as a potential area of concern.

“If we are to maintain an all-volunteer army, we must consider all the factors, to include any barriers that may impact lack of African-American service in the combat arms branches,” he said in a statement to Stars and Stripes.

<http://www.stripes.com/news/special-reports/heroes/heroes-2011/why-do-blacks-receive-fewer-valor-medals-1.146508>

But those are just the statistical explanations. Tyrone Williams, chief operating officer at the outreach group Black Veterans for Social Justice, asserted that African-American troops are receiving fewer valor awards because of lingering racism in the military.

“There is still some institutional racism out there,” he said. “It’s better than in the past, but we still see a lot of bad paper for black veterans, more bad discharges or mistakes with paperwork than with white veterans. It’s still a problem.”

Williams can’t point to any hard data, but he said veterans he works with believe that blacks have to work harder to get recognition and receive services from the military. And because issuance of a valor award depends entirely on recommendations from commanding officers, the process is vulnerable to human biases.

So the medals problem could be due to hidden prejudice against black servicemembers. And it could be due to shifting demographics.

And it could be, as Williams noted, “that you just need some better sources to find the ones that are out there.”

Researcher Catherine Giordono contributed to this report.

Human Relations

<http://ebird.osd.mil/ebfiles/e20110615826086.html> or
http://www.govexec.com/story_page.cfm?articleid=48002&dcn=todaysnews

Adm. Mullen: Local groups need to take lead on services for military families

By Kellie Lunney

GovExec.com, June 14, 2011

Local communities nationwide, not Washington, must take the lead on providing a strong network of support for service members and their families, the outgoing chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said during an event Tuesday.

Adm. Mike Mullen, who is retiring in October, told an audience of service members and military advocates that public and private organizations at the grass-roots level rather than the federal government are in a better position to understand the stresses of military families and help provide the type of mental health care necessary to cope with the strain of a decade of war.

"There's no way the Pentagon, or the [Veterans Affairs Department] can do it in a comprehensive way," Mullen said. He spoke at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial during an event sponsored by Give an Hour, an organization that provides free mental health services across the country to Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families.

Mullen praised the Defense Department for expanding and investing in critical services for military families during the past decade, and for integrating families into programs that are fundamental to the military's readiness. He emphasized, however, that the federal government needs to share best practices and lend support to local communities that are on the ground caring for service members, veterans and their loved ones. "It can't be done from Washington," said Mullen. "It can be supported [from Washington], but not led."

Mullen's wife, Deborah, an advocate for military families, joined her husband and several other speakers, at the event. Deborah Mullen said the government cannot keep operating ineffective and duplicative programs that don't help military families, though she did not specify which ones. "We don't kill programs, and we need to do that," she said.

During the event, leaders from Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation and the Wal-Mart Foundation announced grants to support Community Blueprint, an initiative designed by Give an Hour to help localities address the needs of vets and military families. The Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation awarded the group a \$2 million grant to fund the program in Norfolk, Va., and Fayetteville, N.C. - two areas with a large military presence. The Wal-Mart Foundation committed \$144,000 to the initiative in those cities. Give an Hour will allocate the grant money to local organizations that provide services to military members and their families.

"These grants will help us to evaluate vital services and highlight innovative examples, ensuring they are available and easily accessible to military men and women and families, wherever they live," said Barbara Van Dahlen, founder and president of Give an Hour.

Jennifer Crane, a young combat veteran of Afghanistan, talked about her struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder and re-integrating into society when she returned from war. "I no longer knew how to fit into my life," said Crane, who sought help from Give an Hour and is now a spokeswoman for the organization. "My community did not have the tools to help me when I came home."

Germany Honors U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Mullen

The Associated Press

BERLIN — Germany has presented the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen with one of its highest medals of honor.

The Defense Ministry says President Christian Wulff has awarded the Grand Cross of Merit with Star to Mullen for "his personal contribution for German soldiers on missions" and for his efforts to strengthen the German-American friendship.

German Defense Minister Thomas de Maiziere presented the medal to Mullen in Berlin on Thursday.

Mullen is to retire as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff when his term ends Sept. 30, and Gen. Martin Dempsey, a respected veteran commander in the Iraq war, will take that job as the U.S. president's top military adviser.



German Defense Minister Thomas de Maiziere, left, hands over the Grand Cross of Merit with Star of the Federal Republic of Germany to Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, right, in Berlin, Germany, Thursday, June 9, 2011. (AP Photo/Gero Breloer)



Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff right, and German Defense Minister Thomas de Maiziere, left, shake hands after de Maiziere honored Mullen with the Grand Cross of Merit with Star of the Federal Republic of Germany in Berlin, Germany, June 9, 2011. (AP Photo/Gero Breloer)



Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff poses before he was honored with the Grand Cross of Merit with Star of the Federal Republic of Germany in Berlin, Germany, Thursday, June 9, 2011. (AP Photo/Gero Breloer)

Homeless vets work on historic structures and their own lives

At Heritage Square in Los Angeles, veterans who have struggled learn such skills as masonry, carpentry and even selecting Victorian color schemes.

**By Esmeralda Bermudez, Los Angeles Times
Los Angeles Times June 12, 2011**

When Trent Miller started to work on the 120-year-old barn, it was a termite's paradise.

Much of the Queen Anne structure was rotted, the roof shingles were worn down and the paint was so faded, it was impossible to figure out its former colors.

But Miller is learning as he hammers away that even something terribly beaten down can be rebuilt.

He and the four other men on his crew were recruited to work at Heritage Square Museum in a new program whose goal is to get homeless veterans' lives back on track.

The hope is that they will work not only on the buildings but on themselves as well.

Like the barn, the men have seen better days — before the alcoholism, the drug addictions, the post-war insomnia.

In 10 weeks of training at the Montecito Heights museum, they have learned new skills, including how to handle lead-based paint, how to refurbish weathered wood surfaces and how to set up scaffolding. They have tried their hand at masonry and carpentry and selecting Victorian color schemes.

The program's creators are encouraging the men to use their experience at Heritage Square to pursue careers in historic preservation.

For some of the veterans, it's mostly just about the paycheck. They make \$10 an hour. But Miller, 30, saw more from the start.

"It's a good experience to take something so dilapidated and make it beautiful again," he said on a recent afternoon, as he built a wall, brick by brick. "It makes you feel proud."

The barn the men have been fixing up is known as Dr. Osborne's Carriage Barn. It was built in 1899 on the grounds of Huntington Memorial Hospital in Pasadena. For three decades, it sat in disrepair, but museum officials lacked the money and the skillful hands to restore it.

Now Miller walked around the barn and showed off every detail of the veterans' ongoing work — the epoxy-patched wood siding, the new window discovered beneath a nailed-down board, the smoothly sanded walls, ready for a coat of forest green and ochre.

He is different now from five years ago, when he returned from three tours in Iraq. Back then, he could not shake the nightmares and the anxiety. He'd wake at 3 a.m. and need to drink. In the years that

followed, he sold drugs, got a divorce, bounced from job to job.

In 2010, he was charged with burglary and sent to spend a year at New Directions, a round-the-clock treatment center for homeless veterans on L.A.'s Westside. He got counseling there. It was there, too, that he found out about the historic preservation program, which is run jointly by the center, Heritage Square and Preservation Arts, the restoration company that provides the training.

<http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jun/12/local/la-me-veterans-20110612>

Charles Kibby, owner of Preservation Arts, wants to expand the project with help from grants. He hopes to open a school dedicated to such training, with a focus on veterans.

"How great would that be?" he said. "To have veterans restoring historic buildings all over the country?"

Right now, many of those in the program have much less grandiose plans. Joseph Cruz, 23, is learning to control his anger. Alvin Verdell, 52, struggled with alcoholism after his wife died, and wants to connect more with his son.

Salvador Medrano, 56, is trying to steer clear of heroin.

"I'm too old to be messing around," he said. I want to spend time with family and stay far away from people who might get me in trouble."

Medrano grew up in Oxnard, served in the Army in the mid-1970s, post-Vietnam, and then moved to L.A., where, he says, "I partied too much and drank too much."

Sitting on a bench during his lunch hour, he pointed to the Richard Shaw House, which was built 128 years ago. The two-story building shone with a fresh coat of soft blue and white paint — compliments of the veterans.

"It looks really good, huh?" Medrano said with a proud smile.

Miscellaneous

<http://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2011/06/air-force-amputee-earns-wings-2-years-after-accident-061311w/>

Amputee earns his wings 2 years after accident

By [Jill Laster](#) - Staff writer

Sir Force times, Jun 13, 2011 8:18:46 EDT

When 1st Lt. Ryan McGuire lost his leg after a boating accident two years ago, his dream of becoming a pilot seemed out of reach.

But with determination, a solid support network and a rigorous rehabilitation program, McGuire became the first amputee to finish pilot training May 20 at Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas.

He'll leave June 22 for four months of C-17 training before starting work as a pilot at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.



Courtesy of 1st Lt. Ryan McGuire **First Lt. Ryan McGuire, who lost his leg boating two years ago, graduated from Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training in May.**

“I’m in my flight suit right now and every time I look down at my wings, I still don’t believe they’re there,” McGuire said during a phone interview. “Pilot training is a 12-month program and I’ve been in it for 2½ years, and I’m so used to being a student that every time somebody says the word „pilot“ I just can’t believe that’s what I am right now. I’m officially a pilot.”

On Labor Day weekend 2009, McGuire was jetting across a lake during a boating trip when a

rope became tangled around his leg and yanked him from the boat.

McGuire dislocated his hip, fractured his pelvis and severely injured his right foot — tissue die-off eventually forced a below-the-knee amputation.

He knew it would be a tough road back into pilot training. He not only had to undergo a potentially long, difficult process to stay in the Air Force, he had to physically recover, too.

By Oct. 9, 2009 — about six weeks after his accident — the 6-foot-1 officer had lost 40 pounds and significant muscle mass. Before he could use a prosthetic, he had to rebuild the strength needed just to hold his body up on it.

Watching other wounded service members at the Center for the Intrepid, the San Antonio location where he underwent rehab, gave him inspiration. Hearing stories of several other airmen who underwent amputations but kept their piloting careers also pushed him on.

Getting back into the cockpit wouldn’t be easy, though, since he hadn’t earned his wings yet and wasn’t a rated pilot — plus, he had never heard of a student who had gone back to pilot training and completed the program.

“I knew that it was possible to be a pilot with a prosthetic,” McGuire said. “I knew that I was able to do it after [hearing] these stories, but now it was going to be convincing the others, convincing the upper echelons of the Air Force so I could do this.”

<http://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2011/06/air-force-amputee-earns-wings-2-years-after-accident-061311w/>

McGuire said his commanders were behind him 100 percent. If they knew someone who could help expedite the process, they called.

“I was very nervous the entire time, but it was always good to talk to my commanders back at Laughlin because they were so supportive and were like, „This is going to work. We’re going to do this. And if we don’t do this the first time, we’ll try it the second time around, and the third round and the fourth round,“” McGuire said. “They were just never going to give up.”

Last August, a medical evaluation board declared McGuire fit for active duty. The Air Force approved a medical waiver sending him back into pilot training Oct. 29, and just three days later, McGuire was training again at Laughlin.

By the time he returned to pilot training, McGuire had competed in the Warrior Games and finished the Air Force Marathon. He has also served as a great source of hope to an ROTC cadet who lost his right leg above the knee after a June 25 parachute accident at the Air Force Academy.

Cadet Matt Pirrello is set to return to Ohio University in the fall and has kept his dreams of a piloting career alive since his accident. McGuire was given orders to visit Pirrello after the parachuting mishap.

Pirrello said McGuire, his parents and his siblings have been a great source of support since the accident. McGuire’s success at becoming a pilot despite an amputation is also a great sign, Pirrello said.

“It definitely gives me hope in terms of realizing that the Air Force is recognizing that airmen with amputations can still perform duties and are still in a position to serve,” he said.

<http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2011/06/military-mental-health-treatment-disability-pay-VA-061411w/>

Marine vet: Tie psych treatment to disability pay

By Rick Maze - Staff writer

Marine Corps Times, Jun 14, 2011

A Marine combat veteran who suffered a mental breakdown as a result of war-related trauma said he might have received earlier help if his disability pay had been contingent upon his getting treatment.

Daniel J. Hanson, 27, who said he spent his disability checks on “booze and strip clubs,” said he needed a push from the Veterans Affairs Department to get help that never came until he attempted suicide and ended up in a faith-based program called Minnesota Teen Challenge.

Testifying on Tuesday before the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee, Hanson said he never asked for help in the Marine Corps, and VA’s help wasn’t enough. In the Marines, Hanson said the fact he was an administrative specialist surrounded by infantrymen made him reluctant to speak up. “In a battalion of 1,000 Marines, I didn’t think anyone wanted to hear my complaining,” he said.

At VA, he did receive some help but said the program “lacked any sort of discipline.”

“There was a gentleman that was smoking meth in the stairwell,” he said.

Hanson’s suggestion about linking disability pay to treatment is not new. The 2010 final report of the Advisory Committee on Disability Compensation, led by retired Army Lt. Gen. James Scott, included a similar recommendation.

Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., the veterans’ committee chairman, said one troubling thing about mental health issues among veterans is that once a person starts receiving disability benefits, they don’t seem to get better and often enter a spiraling decline that ironically results in an increase in compensation.

There are concerns about what Hanson described as a “tough love” approach to benefits. In some cases, the loss or threat of loss of disability pay could lead a troubled veteran to attempt suicide, said Rep. Michael Michaud, D-Maine.

Hanson is far from alone. Up to 43 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have experienced traumatic combat events, said Christina Roof of AmVets. “Left untreated, these invisible wounds can have a devastating impact on the lives of those veterans and service members who suffer in silence, as well as on their families.”

VA is not always an easy place to get help, Roof said. “Veterans who were brave enough to ask for mental health care encounter a confusing and frustrating claims system entrenched in bureaucracy,” she said. “Many of these veterans find VA to be more of a hindrance than helpful.”

A VA mental health treatment official said more money is being spent and more mental health staff is available to help diagnose and treat veterans. Last year, 1.2 million veterans received some form of mental health care, said Antonette Zeiss, VA’s acting deputy patient care services officer for mental health.

Treatment is improving, Zeiss said, but she cautioned that “not everyone with PTSD who receives evidence-based treatment is likely to have a favorable response.”

Military Spouses Get Help With Professional Licenses

By Lisa Daniel

American Forces Press Service, 13 June 2011

ARLINGTON, Va., June 13, 2011 – A Defense Department organization is making it easier for military spouses to maintain professional licenses as they move from state to state.

State Liaison and Educational Opportunity, an office of military community and family policy here, today announced that 16 states have adopted laws, or are close to doing so, to make it easier for military spouses to work in their career fields. “It gets them to work faster, and that’s been our objective,” Marcus Beauregard, chief of the state liaison office and a retired Air Force officer, said in an interview with American Forces Press Service.

States require licenses for practitioners in virtually every medical occupation, as well as teaching, social work, cosmetology and other fields, and the standards vary from state to state, Beauregard said. DOD’s state liaison office was created in 2004 to work with states to address military family issues, and the licensing problem has been among the top concerns of families, he said.

Of working military spouses, 33 percent work in fields that require licenses, mostly nursing and teaching, Beauregard said.

The state liaison office created a forum for spouses to discuss the licensing problems on its Facebook page. More than 100 spouses wrote in, describing licensing challenges ranging from the expense of having to license with a new state every two to three years to lengthy processes of certification that include much paperwork, training, waiting periods, internships and the like. Many found that by the time they could get through the process, it would be time to relocate again.

“I gave up education as a profession because of all that was involved in obtaining licensure with each move,” a spouse wrote. “It was a difficult decision.”

The state liaison office formed partnerships with state agencies and professional associations to educate state lawmakers about the unique challenges to military families.

“We’re not looking to make the military community have a preferred status in states,” Beauregard said. “We’re looking at those things that impede people because of their military life. In all cases, we’re just looking to level the playing field.”

The office promoted two strategies for mitigating the licensing challenges. The first -- and favorite -- is for states to permit licenses by endorsement of the last state license. The second option allows a temporary license to expedite the spouse’s employment options.

States that have enacted laws for endorsement of licenses -- or those waiting for a governor’s signature -- are Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Montana, North Carolina, New York and Texas. States that allow temporary licenses are Alaska, Florida, Kentucky, Missouri, Ohio, South Carolina and Tennessee. Utah allows nonresident military spouses to use out-of-state licenses, and Virginia allows military spouses who leave the state to re-use the license upon their return, Beauregard said.

The state liaison office’s efforts are in line with President Barack Obama’s directive released early this year to promote a “whole of government” approach to helping military families. Since 2008, the office also has succeeded in getting 39 states to pass laws to accept the out-of-state course work of school-age military children.

Obama administration aims to shut down thousands of federal websites

By Sean Reilly

Federal Times, 14 June 2011

The Obama administration wants to take down half of the roughly 2,000 major federal websites in the coming year — with 500 of those shutting down in the next few months, officials said Monday.

Agencies also are barred from creating new sites for 90 days while a task force begins updating federal website policy.

Two-thousand sites "is clearly ridiculous," said the Office of Management and Budget's deputy director, Jeffrey Zients, in a conference call with reporters. "It's no wonder the American people are unsure of where to obtain information from the federal government."

Since each major website — for example, WhiteHouse.gov and USASpending.gov — encompasses thousands of smaller sites, there may be as many as 24,000 major and minor websites of varying usability and accessibility, Zients wrote in a memo that was posted on OMB's website. In the next month, federal Chief Information Officer Vivek Kundra, working with the General Services Administration, will create a task force to develop recommendations for federal website policy and best practices.

In a video Monday on the White House site, President Obama took aim at one site for a Forest Service string band called the Fiddlin' Foresters.

"I'll put their music on my iPod, but I'm not paying for their website," Obama said. The site had been taken down by Monday afternoon; a spokesman for the Agriculture Department, which includes the Forest Service, could not say whether that move was in response to Obama's criticism.

On a related issue, agencies will have to develop customer service plans and publish them on their open government websites within 180 days, Zients said in the memo. In those plans, agencies must each come up with one "signature initiative" that makes use of technology to improve service.

Thousands eligible to exit service early

By Dan Lamothe - Staff writer

Marine Corps Times, Jun 12, 2011 9:25:30 EDT

The Marine Corps is extending its early release program through next fiscal year, and more than 37,000 Marines have a chance to exit the service up to 90 days ahead of schedule.

The effort, known as the Voluntary Enlisted Early Release Program, was outlined in Marine administrative message 303/11, released May 20. More than 2,500 Marines are expected to use it, saving the Corps more than \$20 million.

Any active-duty enlisted Marine with an end-of-active-service date between Oct. 1, 2011, and Sept. 30, 2012, is eligible for the 2012 program, run by Manpower and Reserve Affairs. Marines with an EAS date before then are still eligible to join the 2,500-plus Marines who have opted to leave early through the 2011 program.

Most eligibility requirements remain the same. Marines who are interested must:

- Request to separate early no more than 90 days before their EAS.
- Not be preparing for a deployment.
- Attend pre-separation counseling, including the Corps' mandatory Transition Assistance Program and the Transition Assistance Management Program.
- Be eligible for an honorable or general discharge under honorable conditions.
- Be a U.S. citizen or resident alien who has served at least three years of active service at the time of early release.

The 2012 program comes with a new wrinkle for Marines with EAS dates that fall shortly after the new fiscal begins on Oct. 1. An early exit would allow these Marines to leave in fiscal 2011 instead, requiring "cross year" approval from Manpower.

Other catches:

Marines cannot be scheduled for retirement, owe the Corps leave time, already have an early release planned through another program, or be undergoing treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury without a waiver.

Marines also must have their commander's approval.

Early releases of less than 90 days can be taken, but commanders are encouraged to expedite requests as early as possible to maximize the amount of money the Corps will save. Commanders must "provide specific justification for individual Marines not recommended for approval to participate in the program," the MARADMIN said.

The early-out program was first launched in the second half of fiscal 2010 to save the Corps money. To date, more than 3,600 Marines have taken it, Manpower officials said.

Racism

Around Tornado Deaths, a Nagging Tale of Shelter Denied

By CAMPBELL ROBERTSON
New York Times, June 15, 2011

CORDOVA, Ala. — Everybody in town heard about it.

It was discussed openly and in whispers, over the phone and in the church pews. When it was brought up at school, the curious were quickly shushed. Eventually, the whole thing got pushed aside by other concerns, a bit of nastiness better forgotten, or judged never to have occurred at all.

But Madison Phillips says it is true. He says that he and his mother, Annette Singleton, both black, were turned away from a church shelter by a white woman on the afternoon of April 27, the day of the tornadoes. And within hours, Ms. Singleton and two of Madison's young friends, who had been huddling with him in his house within yards of that church, were dead.

"People said, „Don't go around telling this, this is going to ruin Cordova's name,"" said Madison, 16, who is now living in Hawaii with his half-brother, a Marine corporal. "But the truth is going to sit there forever and ever."

There is little agreement about what happened, or whether it happened at all, and the full truth may never be known. Madison says he did not recognize the woman. The only other witness, an older man who is known around town for his frequent run-ins with the law and fondness for alcohol, is saying that he did not see the situation firsthand, but only talked to Madison's mother as she was coming and going.

The minister at the church, the Rev. Ryan Rosser, said the doors were open all day long to anyone seeking shelter; indeed, there were black utility workers among the 45 or so people in the church basement during the second tornado.

Mr. Rosser said that none of the people he had spoken with who were there recalled anything like what Madison describes happening.

"Usually in a small town, stuff's going to rise to the surface," he said.

Versions of the account multiplied and changed around town, often molded by personal animosities. But Madison's story has stayed consistent, prompting a nagging, uneasy question about what kinds of things are possible, still possible, in a small Southern town.

Much of Cordova, a once-prosperous mill town, still appears a bombed-out shell. A stately ruin remains of the nearly century-old Methodist church where, Madison says, he and his mother sought refuge. Only a concrete slab remains of the house where they lived.

A dispute about post-storm temporary housing exploded last month, set off by the city government's insistence on upholding an ordinance against single-wide trailers. The mayor, Jack Scott, citing a need to maintain property values, said exceptions would not be made for FEMA trailers, though the temporary police headquarters, a pharmacy and City Hall are all in similar trailers.

The controversy attracted reporters and protesters, and earned Cordova some unwelcome national attention, though, as it turned out, only two households were actually eligible for the trailers and both found other arrangements.

Amid the clamor, the story about the mother and son at the church did not rise above whispers.

Few whites in Cordova believe that it could have happened here, and, pointing to versions of the story that are demonstrably false, generally dismiss it as a malicious rumor.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/16/us/16cordova.html?ref=us>

As in so many small towns, the black residents, who make up about an eighth of Cordova's population of 2,400, see things differently. It has never occurred to many whites, for example, what the name of the popular restaurant, Rebel Queen, may suggest to blacks, let alone that black people in town felt uncomfortable meeting someone there.

"It's a lot of hidden racism that goes on in Cordova," said Pete Bush, who is black and was the high school football coach here until he resigned in January. "I know that because I've been here all my life."

There is a nearly unanimous conviction among blacks here that the incident described by Madison Phillips not only could happen here, but did. Yet there is little vocal outrage.

Ms. Singleton, who was 46, was relatively new to town. She went to church 45 minutes to the southeast in Birmingham. The two boys who died with her, Jonathan and Justin Doss, ages 12 and 10, were from a poor white family who lived in an apartment complex on the outskirts of Cordova, where Madison and his mother had lived until recently.

"Nobody hardly knew her," said Theodore Branch, 74, who has been the city's only black council member for 36 years. "If you live here and everybody knows you, it's a different situation."

The story of what happened, or what might have happened, at the Long United Methodist Church started spreading immediately after the tornado passed, most likely beginning with Homer Rodgers, the older man who was the secondhand witness. Given Mr. Rodgers's past, it was met with skepticism.

But Madison, who was hospitalized with head and shoulder injuries, told a similar story.

After a destructive early morning tornado, Madison said, he and his mother drove to their old apartment complex. Another tornado was coming in the afternoon, and Ms. Singleton was trying to collect gas money for a drive to Birmingham. She met a couple who had sought shelter from the first tornado at the Methodist church, and, fearing the next tornado was approaching, she and Madison returned to town.

They spoke briefly to an older man, said Madison, who does not know Mr. Rodgers, before approaching a woman coming out of the church. Ms. Singleton asked whether the church was being used as a shelter, he said. The woman told her it was not.

They then returned to the apartments and picked up the Doss brothers, Madison's playmates.

Jacqueline Doss, the boys' mother, recalls a different chronology of the day's events, saying that Ms. Singleton came over only once, in the afternoon. But Ms. Doss also says that at that time, Ms. Singleton told her she had been turned away at the church.

Nevertheless, Madison and the two boys were at the house less than an hour before the second, deadly tornado hit.

In the ensuing weeks, a group of well-off people in the county put together money for Ms. Singleton's funeral expenses and for Madison's ticket to go live with his brother in Hawaii. The talk faded into the background.

On a recent weekday, at a soup kitchen for tornado survivors at the Free Will Baptist Church, whites and blacks worked alongside one another. Everyone who was asked had heard the story. Some believed it, and were disgusted by it. Others said with so many rumors flying around, they were inclined to just let it go.

Loudelia Branch, the wife of the city council member, lamented that, pointing out what was undeniably true. "She existed," she said of Ms. Singleton. "It's not like she did not exist."

Religion

Rep. Peter King: 'Morons' Attack Islamist Hearings

By Hiram Reisner

Newsmax.com, 16 June 2011

Rep. Peter King, chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, says there “is no doubt” that fanatical Islamists are trying to radicalize American prison inmates. And he castigated the “vacuous morons” at The New York Times and elsewhere who contend that his hearings are politically incorrect.



Rep. Peter King notes moderate Islam has been a guiding force in prisoner rehabilitation over the years, despite the radical elements. (Getty Images Photo)

The Republican New York congressman made the comments on MSNBC’s “Morning Joe” today, the day after he convened the second in a set of hearings into the radical Islamist threat in the United States.

“We’ve had a number of cases where they’ve gone on from prison to a post-prison radicalization and then to carry out attempted jihad,” King said. “This shouldn’t even be debatable: There’s no doubt it’s there — we could have a question about the extent of it, we could have a question about how far we should go as far as dealing with it.” King noted that he received considerable criticism after the first hearings in March.

“When I see critics coming up like CAIR [Council on American-Islamic Relations] and other groups attacking me for holding these hearings, I would be derelict if I didn’t have these hearings,” King said. “This is a real issue — it’s there — it’s something to be concerned about.

“And I just found going back to the first hearing, you had those vacuous morons at The New York Times attacking me in four editorials and two front-page stories, and you had the Council on American-Islamic Relations, you had the media going apoplectic,” he said. “And the fact is: I will stand by every word that came out of that hearing — they were fair, they were decisive, and they were absolutely necessary.

“As chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, I have no alternative,” King said. “I’m not going to back down to political correctness.” King was asked what anecdotal evidence prompted him to schedule the hearing on radicalization in U.S. prisons. He responded that law enforcement officials had informed him that some radical Muslim chaplains were coercing prison inmates.

“Virtually any prison official you talk to — in this case we had the officials there . . . describing how vital it is that we stop this radicalization,” he said. “Part of the problem is that there is no way of vetting — there is really systematic way at vetting who Muslim chaplains are going to be.”

King stressed that moderate Islam has been a guiding force in prisoner rehabilitation over the years, despite the radical elements. “Many young men — especially African-American men — have turned their lives around by being converted to Islam,” he said. “So it’s not the conversion to Islam, it’s the radical type of Islam that is being carried out.”

Sexual Assault / Harassment

<http://ebird.osd.mil/ebfiles/e20110614825920.html> or

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/claire-mccaskill/a-scary-number-3000-milit_b_876001.html

A Scary Number - 3,000 Military Sexual Assaults

By Sen. Claire McCaskill, U.S. Senator from Missouri

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Here's a scary number: last year nearly 3,000 incidents of sexual assault were reported throughout the U.S. Armed Forces. Scarier yet, the Pentagon estimates that only 13 percent of sexual crimes were actually reported, so the real number of assaults is probably significantly higher. Although both male and female service members report incidents of sexual assault, among female veterans nearly a third say they were victims of rape or assault while they were serving - this is twice the rate of the civilian population.

We should be embarrassed. The parents of our military men and women send their child into the military knowing that they will face dangerous enemies and combat situations. What they cannot and should not tolerate, however, is their child being in an unsafe environment in their own military community. Our military men and women deserve better so they can focus on their mission. While the Pentagon has made substantial progress in addressing this issue in recent years, much more needs to be done to address this grave problem.

When Leon Panetta came before the Senate Armed Services Committee for his confirmation hearing, I asked him to pledge to be vigilant in the fight against sexual assault in the military. He has his work cut out for him. We need to aggressively attack this problem with the full force of our abilities.

This issue is near and dear to my heart. In my days as a prosecutor, I saw too many cases of sexual assault, more than anyone should ever see. But at least in the civilian courts, victims have a better chance at justice through a standardized, legal process. According to some reports, in the military only 8 percent of sexual assaults that are investigated end in prosecution, compared with 40 percent in civilian courts.

Worse, all too often in the military, victims are unwilling to report the crime because they worry nothing will be done, or fear punishment for coming forward or worry that doing so could impact their career. That is not acceptable, and it has to change. Unlike some places in the world, we as a nation have recognized that sexual crimes are anathema to society and even more so to the good order and discipline of the military. We continue to have the most professional military in the world, and I am convinced that our men and women in uniform are capable of not only tackling this problem but eradicating sexual assault from the ranks.

We have to make certain that victims feel safe when they report an assault and know their confidentiality will be protected. We must ensure victims are provided with mental health services and quality health care, whether during active duty or later as they transition back into civilian life.

A good first step would be for the Senate to pass the Support for Survivors Act, a bill that Senators Klobuchar, Collins, Murkowski and I introduced. It provides victims of sexual assault with important information they need to seek justice and ensures that all documentation, such as medical records, connected to a case of sexual assault is stored uniformly and sufficiently by the Department of Defense.

Mr. Panetta agreed that we have to do better to protect our men and women in uniform from becoming victims of sexual assault and provide them with the support and resources they need to report and seek justice for these crimes. We must protect the men and women who have sacrificed so much to serve our country. Hopefully, Mr. Panetta, assuming his confirmation, will partner with me in this fight. We owe it to our heroes in uniform.