

How to Eradicate a Scourge

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"The Corps must always be mindful of what it stands for and realize that in its willingness to meet any challenge and assume any hardship lies its attraction to young recruits and its value to the country. Unpopular and difficult issues will continue to present themselves, but they must be met head-on and without compromise. This is what the Corps did in its unrelenting campaign against drugs. In that matter, the Marines proved once again that they are justified in holding themselves as something more than just a cross-section of society. This same dynamic attitude must prevail wherever societal conditions threaten the standards of the Corps."

LtGen Victor H. "Brute" Krulak, *First to Fight*

I. Introduction

The results of the recent RAND survey on sexual assault in the military have been published and confirmed what some of us had feared: that the Marine Corps has the highest rate of unwanted sexual contact in the military, with nearly 8% of our female Marines and 1% of our male Marines being victims of this scourge in FY-14. This is completely unacceptable, inconsistent with our core values and who we are, and an *existential threat* to the trust and respect of the American people. Declaring progress isn't enough, and we can't train our way out of this. This is a scientific problem and must be solved using scientific methods.

In the 6th Marine Corps District, we implemented a campaign plan in the fall of 2012 with the goal of *completely eradicating* sexual misconduct from our ranks. This campaign plan is based on the same concepts Colonel William C. Gorgas used to eradicate yellow fever during construction of the Panama Canal from July 1905 to December 1906. The lesson of yellow fever is a powerful one: *eradicating a scourge seems impossible until someone actually does it*. From fiscal years 2008-2012, the 6th MCD averaged about 10 substantiated incidents of recruiter-on-applicant sexual misconduct per year (that we knew about) ranging from inappropriate sexual relationships to sexual assault. Since fall 2012, the 6th MCD leadership team has been methodically, deliberately, and systematically *eradicating sexual misconduct* from our ranks. This paper lays out the *system* and *science* of our campaign plan to explain how and why it's working.

II. The System

First, establish an effective "quarantine" that reaches every Marine and future Marine entering the ecosystem. We're doing this through a three-tiered process that ensures every Marine and future Marine knows our standards, what sexual misconduct is (from inappropriate relationships, to harassment, to assault), and what steps they *must take* if they witness it. Every future Marine views an educational video upon enlistment on appropriate standards of conduct. Each new female future Marine also talks by phone to the 6th MCD's Uniformed Victim Advocate (UVA) to ensure we have correct contact information for them and to ensure they know we will be talking to them again before they ship to recruit training. This is the first tier. The next tier is each Staff Noncommissioned officer in Charge teaching a class on "Whole-of-Character" as part of a "Values-Based Training" package to each new applicant within their first 30 days in the delayed entry program. This solidifies that they are now part of "us" and are expected to live by our core values. The third tier occurs at MCRD Parris Island in the form of enhanced screening of all female applicants to ensure that all of our Marines have been strictly adherent to our core values and, if any applicant has had something terrible happen to them in their past, by either Marine or civilian, they get the help and counseling they need to be *successful* in our Corps.

Second, wage an all-out "war" against the conditions in which sexual misconduct can occur. We've implemented a number of steps to catch these conditions, and the Marines who perpetrate them, "left of boom." For example, we now have a "Two-Person Integrity" (TPI) policy for all recruiting activities with Marines and applicants of the opposite sex. If there is an exception to be made, it must be briefed and logged into the Marine Corps Information Support System (MCRISS) by the Staff NCOIC, and then verified and checked by command group members during their monthly rounds. This policy institutionalizes a "third point of contact" for every recruiting encounter, thus keeping honest Marines honest. As any machine-gunner knows, a tripod is more stable than a bipod. We've also banned all forms of communication on personal devices between Marines and applicants, with particular attention paid to eliminating "texting." Texting is an unsupervised, informal, and dangerous mode of communication that can easily be misunderstood and manipulated by predators. We're also constantly on guard against inappropriate language, dress, and juvenile behavior that predators will often introduce into an environment to pollute it and "normalize" others to their planned deviant behavior. By waging "war" against the conditions in which

sexual misconduct can occur, we're teaching our Marines to "see" the invisible forces shaping the behavior and culture around them, and attempting to get rid of the perpetrators *before* they're able to commit acts of violence against junior Marines and future Marines.

Third, build a protective shell around the most vulnerable populations. This is a scientific problem. In the recruiting arena, our most vulnerable population is our young female applicants. In the operating forces, they are young first-term Marines -- especially female Marines. We've created a protective shell by, first, ensuring that all female future Marines talk to our UVA immediately upon their enlistment (as noted above). We're also sending a climate survey to at least 10% of all applicants -- both male and female -- every month, which I personally review before sending to the RS Commanders. We're also having our UVA personally call at least 10% of all female applicants each month (and sometimes more) to ensure we're adhering to our core values, that these future Marines have any questions answered, and to ensure that we're properly executing our plans. If we do detect a potential problem, we'll do a 100% scrub. *You don't eradicate yellow fever by not looking hard for it!* This lets the entire field know we're constantly checking and either catching Marines doing things right or finding and fixing problems *before* they become catastrophic. The act of asking the hard questions also creates an empowerment-accountability dynamic: asking the hard questions empowers our most vulnerable population and evokes the harder responses that hold all of us accountable.

Fourth, enplace ruthless accountability mechanisms in the event of an incident. This is not intended to replace military justice for the perpetrator, but rather to educate the leaders and peers who allowed the culture to be degraded to the point where one of our future Marines suffered. This is the hardest step, but most essential too. We do this in the form of a "Culture Review" in which I personally drill down into everything that was going on in the micro-climate of that unit within the 90 days leading up to when the incident of sexual misconduct occurred. These are, by intent and design, *brutal*. They are intended to train other Marines to identify the symptoms and warning signs of predators so they, and we, can take action to get them out of our ranks *before* they're able to victimize other Marines and future Marines. No one emerges from these "Culture Reviews" unscathed, to include myself, as I send an unvarnished written report to the Commanding General describing exactly what I found. After doing about a dozen of these, we're now able to "see" the invisible forces perpetuating the invisible war. This is an

accountability mechanism with teeth. *Moreover, these “Culture Reviews” are more than simple post-mortems: they tell every Marine that, in the 21st Century, keeping your own honor clean is no longer good enough – “Keeping our Corps’ Honor Clean” is an active, offensive effort requiring daily vigilance and action on the part of every single Marine!*

III. The Science

Now, let’s apply some hard data against this problem, using 6th MCD in FY-14 as a case study. Our average total strength is 820 Marines and 30 Civilian Marines, to include 62 female Marines. In FY-14, we enlisted a total of 7084 future Marines with 674 female future Marines, while contracting 372 into our officer candidate pool with 59 female candidates. We shipped a total of 503 female applicants and 31 female officer candidates to boot camp and officer candidates’ school. We sent a total of 7084 climate surveys to our future Marines and had 732 returned; we also had our UVA talk to 563 enlisted female applicants. In FY-14, 6th MCD did not have one substantiated incident of sexual assault, and had only one substantiated incident of recruiter-on-applicant sexual misconduct (a 34-year old Marine had a consensual sexual encounter with a 17-year old female, although in many states this would constitute statutory rape).

But this data *does not* necessarily mean that 6th MCD had no sexual predators within our ranks during this time frame. For example, in FY-14 we relieved several Marines for violating aspects of our campaign plan: 2 Marines for communicating with female applicants on their personal devices; 3 Marines for inviting Marines to their personal residences to consume alcohol; 1 Marine for communicating with a female applicant in an unprofessional manner on social media; 1 Marine for violating a military protective order with a female applicant; and 2 Marines for violating our TPI Policy. It is my belief that at least *some* of these Marines were on the trajectory towards committing an act of sexual misconduct – to include possibly assault – against some of our future Marines. The vigilance and core values of their peers and others prompted them to report these infractions *before* these potential predators could act on their designs.

There’s actually scientific research to support the theory that a very small number of individuals are committing an outrageous amount of sexual violence. In a 2002 study in New England, Dr. David Lisak published in *Violence and Victims*,

“120 rapists were identified in a sample of 1,882 college students. Of the 120, 76 were serial rapists who had each, on average, left 14 victims in their wake. Their collective, grim tally included the following: 439 rapes and attempted rapes, 49 sexual assaults, 277 acts of sexual abuse against children, 66 acts of physical abuse against children and 214 acts of battery against intimate partners.”¹

Dr. Lisak profiled these predators as primarily men coming from all demographic groups; he added that they use “sophisticated” methods to plan and execute their attacks, with alcohol often employed as their primary weapon; they are often narcissistic, sociopathic, and hyper-masculine; and violent against others in multiple contexts.² In other words, rapists are likely our barracks bullies and hazers too.

Now, let’s look at the Marine Corps’ sexual assault data from 1 November 2012 – 1 November 2013:

- Total: 318 in USMC (358 total, but 40 prior-to-service incidents were subtracted).
- Victims: 222 Female Marines; 195 (88%) had less than 4 years of service; 96 Males: 92 (96%) had less than 4 years of service.
- Location: 193/318 (61%) occurred on base; 75 of 193 (38%) occurred in "housing/residence"; 55/193 (28%) occurred in a "Government/Public Building."
- Alcohol: 195/318 (61%) involved alcohol.
- Type Unit: 256/318 (84%) were from Marines in the operating forces.³

Pulling this data together, we’re able to draw some insightful conclusions. First, nearly all of the Marine Corps’ sexual assault victims are on their first enlistment and assigned to the operating forces. Second, most of these sexual assaults are occurring on base and fueled by alcohol, which means that underage drinking is occurring in our barracks. Third, a relatively small number of sexual predators have likely found camouflage in the Marine Corps and are able to manipulate our warrior ethos, pride in being a Marine, and disengaged and naïve leadership to perpetrate acts of sexual violence against unsuspecting Marines.

IV. Conclusion

Eradicating the scourge of sexual assault from our ranks is not only a challenge, but also a historic opportunity to truly make our Corps better by empowering our Marines to confidently and aggressively compete for, *and lead*, the best male and female talent out there. *This is about making our Corps more elite and taking care of Marines!* Moreover, I think eradicating the scourge of sexual misconduct from our Corps to the extent we've done with drugs is doable with the right programs, policies and commitment from commanders and their Marines. While aggressively prosecuting sexual predators is absolutely imperative and must continue, *more prosecutions inevitably will mean more victims and more damaged lives!* The 6th MCD campaign plan does not strive to reform sexual predators (as that's impossible) but rather focuses on raising the vigilance and awareness of *everybody else* to "see" the invisible forces shaping the invisible war and leveraging the inter-locking accountability mechanisms of the *whole system* to sniff out, identify, and hold accountable potential perpetrators *before* they're able to commit acts of sexual violence against our people. You never hear about Marines blowing themselves and their peers up in a tent by playing with live grenades; if Marines were to witness such a reckless act by another Marine, they would instantly intervene and report it, and ensure that the offender was properly held accountable. *They would be in the blast radius!* We need to develop a similar mindset in our Marines towards completely eradicating the scourge of sexual assault from our Corps – *we're all in the blast radius too!*

¹ Dr David Lisak, "Predators: Uncomfortable Truths about Campus Rapists," *Connection*, Summer 2004, p 19.

² Ibid.

³ This data comes from my participation in the Marine Corps' SAPR OPT.