

West Point now tops in sexual misconduct

By Kelly Kennedy
TIMES STAFF WRITER

After several years of serving as the model military academy, the U.S. Military Academy at West Point has crept ahead of the Naval Academy and the scandal-plagued Air Force Academy in numbers of cadets who say they have been sexually assaulted or harassed.

During the 2004-05 school year, 65 percent of West Point women who took a Defense Manpower Data Survey said they had been sexually assaulted, 62 percent said they had been sexually harassed and 36 percent said they had experienced sexist behavior. The survey defined assault as rape or unwanted touching or fondling.

At the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., 4 percent of women surveyed said they had been sexually assaulted, 49 percent said they had been sexually harassed and 82 percent said they had dealt with sexist behavior.

At the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., 5 percent of women surveyed said they had been sexually assaulted, 59 percent said they faced sexual harassment and 3 percent said they had been the object of sexist behavior.

The survey is part of a congressionally mandated plan to deal with sexual assault and harassment at U.S. military academies following a scandal that erupted in 2003 at the Air Force Academy after scores of male cadets reported being the

victims of sexual misconduct and a leadership that was either unresponsive or ostracizing.

That experience and a series of initiatives to correct the problem help explain how the Air Force fared best in the latest survey, said a Pentagon spokesman.

"The Air Force was forced by circumstances to react to it before the other academies," said Roger Kaplan, spokesman for the Department of Defense Joint Task Force Sexual Assault Prevention and Response team. "I'm pretty confident that [if] you give Annapolis and West Point another year, and they'll be where the Air Force Academy is now."

But at West Point, spokesman Lt. Col. Kent Cassella said the school has had sexual harassment education programs in place since 2002 and that the superintendent conducted a survey that year to look at sexual assault and harassment issues. This is the first time the numbers have gone up, Cassella said.

"Our constant goal is to eliminate this illegal behavior and provide a safe and healthy environment for our cadets," he said.

On March 18, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced a new Defense Department-wide policy allowing victims of sexual assault to confidentially seek counseling and medical care. The academies, including West Point, also implemented sexual-response co-

ordinators and victims' advocates within the past year.

Kaplan said the new policies could have led to an increase in reporting assault and harassment.

Congress ordered five annual surveys as part of a series of steps taken after dozens of women reported rapes at the Air Force Academy in 2003. In the latest survey, the second in a series of mandated reports, 2,049 women and 3,287 men filled out a pen-and-paper survey at the three academies. At West Point, 15 percent of the 4,000 students are women.

Among the key findings of the survey for West Point cadets:

- 97 percent said the assaults were by fellow cadets.

- 74 percent of sexual assaults of women occurred on the installation.

- 97 percent of sexual assaults on women were perpetrated by men, and 3 percent were by women.

- 97 percent of offenders against women were other cadets; 3 percent were faculty members.

- 9 percent of assaulted women said they were assaulted by more than one person at a time.

- 7 percent of women who reported an incident said they experienced retaliation from an authority.

- 39 percent of women who reported an incident said they faced other repercussions.

- 34 percent of assaulted women said alcohol or drugs were involved.

- 20 percent of assaulted women said they were so intoxicated they



GIN KAI, NAVY

A survey of cadets at the service academies finds that 62 percent of women at West Point said they had been sexually harassed. That puts the academy ahead of the Naval Academy and Air Force Academy, where such behavior has garnered more attention. Above, plebes train at the Naval Academy.

could not consent.

- 29 percent of assaulted women said the offender was intoxicated.

- 29 percent of assaulted women said the offender used force to make them consent.

Authors said that because of changes made to the survey, the findings could not be compared against previous results.

That's one of the issues that Anita Sanchez, director of communications for the Miles Foundation, an organization that promotes awareness about sexual assault and harassment within the military, said worries her about the methodologies of the survey. When survey questions change from year to year, it's impossible to compare the numbers or have a benchmark to see how the academies are doing, she said.

"We need to be able to look at apples versus apples — not just with the academies but also with civilian college campuses," she said.

Sanchez said she was not surprised to see that 64 percent of West Point women believed the educational programs were slightly or not at all effective in preventing sexual harassment, because several civilian studies have shown that such training has little impact. For it to work, she said, students need the training at least quarterly.

However, Cassella said that cadets surveyed correctly identified sexual assault and harassment, as well as reporting procedures, as taught in training.

West Point received a copy of the survey Dec. 24, and Cassella said his command plans to look at it further and then decide what action to take.

"Our ultimate goal is for our cadets to think, four years from now, how do you prevent these things for your soldiers?" he said. □

Kelly Kennedy covers the Army.

Navy professor charged over 'crude' remarks

BALTIMORE — A Naval Academy professor who allegedly made sexually offensive remarks to midshipmen has been charged with conduct unbecoming an officer and other offenses.

An attorney for Lt. Bryan Black, who teaches oceanography at the academy in Annapolis, Md., said charges are baseless and that language his client used was mild in a military setting.

According to court documents, Black used "crude, sexual terms" to refer to his ex-wife in at least 10 conversations with midshipmen. He's also accused of using sexually offensive language to describe his admiration for battleships in a conversation with several midshipmen, at least one of whom is a woman. Both incidents occurred in August.

The comments my client made nothing that midshipmen would have seen in the movie "Top

Gun," Charles Gittins, Black's attorney, said Jan. 7. "In fact, one of the comments he made is right out of 'Top Gun,' except it refers to a battleship" instead of a plane.

In a motion to dismiss the charges, Gittins argues that Vice Adm. Rodney Rempt, the academy superintendent, pursued the case against his client only after he was rebuked by two members of the Naval Academy Board of Visitors, including Sen. Barbara Mikulski, D-Md., for his handling of sexual harassment at the academy.

Cmdr. Rod Gibbons, a Naval Academy spokesman, confirmed in a statement that Black had been charged with conduct unbecoming an officer, indecent language and failure to obey a lawful general order or regulation. He declined to discuss specifics of the case or Rempt's role, citing the ongoing legal proceedings.

"The standard is very clear: The

Navy does not tolerate sexual harassment, misconduct or assault; these issues are taken seriously, all allegations are thoroughly investigated, people are held accountable for their actions and due process is ensured," Gibbons wrote.

Gittins did not dispute that his client used obscene epithets to refer to his former wife but said they were in private conversations with male midshipmen.

He said Black apologized to a female midshipman after he made comments about a battleship that referred to male and female sexual arousal.

The midshipman considered the matter closed and never filed a complaint under the academy's sexual-harassment policy, said Gittins, who predicted that the woman "is going to be dragged kicking and screaming into this."

The nation's military academies have been clouded by allegations

of sexual harassment. Last summer, a Defense Department task force reported that hostile attitudes and inappropriate treatment of women persist at the Naval Academy and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

Gittins said the report has resulted in "oversensitivity and the rush to criminalize any conduct by a male that isn't particularly sensitive to what the Naval Academy leadership now perceives as appropriate language."

He added, "I'm a graduate of the academy. This makes me sick."

A preliminary investigative report into the allegations concluded that "Lt. Black's actions do not warrant criminal processing," and that he should receive a letter of caution and formal counseling.

Rempt pushed for a special court-martial, Gittins said. Black was formally charged in October, according to court documents. A pre-

liminary hearing in the case was to be held Jan. 13, followed by the court-martial Jan. 30.

Black would not face a discharge or incarceration if convicted. He could lose two-thirds of his monthly wages for a year and receive a punitive letter of reprimand, Gittins said. If convicted, Black could be discharged in a separate proceeding, Gittins said.

In an appeal to the secretary of the Navy, Black noted that the investigation began shortly after the academy was criticized by the military task force. "I believe I am the 'poster child' being held out as an example," he wrote.

Black declined comment Jan. 7. Documents show that Black "often discussed inappropriate topics with the midshipmen," including "his previous sexual encounters with strippers, Hooter's waitresses and other women that he dated."

He was counseled by his department head, after which his behavior improved. □

— The Associated Press