

BAD DEEDS, BAD 'WEEDS'

The May release of the Defense Department's report on sexual assault in the military for fiscal 2012 continues to drive an understandably high level of attention and outrage from Congress and the American people. The increasing numbers of reported sexual assaults from calendar year 2004 to fiscal 2014 is a disturbing trend, but not the one of most concern to our military profession.

In conversations with senior military members, the focus turns to questioning the numbers and then debating the impact of encouraging victim reporting and contending that the rates of assaults are comparable to the occurrence in American society. These are all red herrings that deflect from the core issue identified in the report's executive summary, "Sexual assault is a crime that has no place in the Department of Defense. It is an

attack on the values we defend and on the cohesion our units demand and forever changes the lives of victims and their families."

It is discouraging and disappointing that not much has changed in the incidents of sexual assaults as evidenced by the increased numbers of reports. It is equally discouraging that the number of estimated unwanted sexual contacts rose from 19,300 to 26,000 since last year's report.

Thinking about how to frame Army leaders' responsibility to address this phenomenon, I am reminded of an anecdote from the father of a college friend who had been director of public works at a large Army installation: "I got a telephone call from the post chief of staff. He said, 'Colonel, there are too many damn dandelions on the parade field.' I responded, 'Sir, how many would you like?'"

Such is the case with sexual assaults when our military members

contend that it is easy to say that any number represents too many, then accede that it is not possible to eliminate the occurrences. I hold that that contention is an abrogation of leadership within the profession of arms. We have current data that establish the circumstances of the preponderance of assaults — junior enlisted (E-1 to E-4) victims (73 percent) with junior enlisted and noncommissioned officer offenders (51 percent and 28 percent, respectively). Past analysis has identified assaults occurring within the first 90 days of unit assignment, on weekends, with alcohol involved and with a lack of leader presence.

This is metaphorically comparable to weeds on the parade ground. Dandelion seeds will blow in and, given the opportunity, germinate, grow and bloom. Responsible stewards of the field will fertilize the field, apply weed retardant, perform spot weed removal and nur-

ture good grass. Army leaders at all levels have to provide their attention and actions such that weeds of bad behavior cannot take root.

The FY2012 DoD report cites the efforts of senior civilian and military officials to emplace policies and programs, as well as the upcoming revision of the DoD-wide Sexual Assault Prevention and Response strategic plan.

Rather than lamenting the scrutiny and additional requirements of the Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention program, leaders within the profession of arms must remain focused to ensure their organizations' deeds align with our institution's words.

Having effective programs of education, applying resources to points of vulnerability and holding leaders accountable for the protection, nurturing and repair of the force is an obligation of stewardship. We should expect and demand respect for our service members by systemically eradicating behavior inconsistent with our

professional values.

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ALL-FEMALE INFANTRY UNITS

Some women can handle the male Infantry School, and could even do better than most men, but not in the amount that we need. So how about this: All-women infantry units that go by an upgraded women's physical training test, harder training — but not so hard that they fail like the women in the Marine testing.

Pros: Women can now be in direct combat, more women join the military, better dating ratios, women don't slow down the male Infantry School, reduced worry of rape or sexual assaults because you know adding a small number of women into all-male platoons cannot be a good idea. Cons: I can't see one. What do you think?

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COMMON CAMO If you had to pick a pattern from one of the services, which seems most effective?