USA: Female Army Colonel Removed from Command for Sexual Abuse and Harassment Allegations

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A female officer of the United States Army was removed from the Command of a Unit of the 5th Security Force Assistance Brigade (5th SFAB), based at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, in the state of Washington, following serious allegations of sexual harassment and abuse towards subordinates. The colonel was relieved of her duties on October 13, 2023, sparking a heated debate about the conduct of military leaders and the implications of these allegations in a military context.

The Colonel's Case and Her Dismissal

The colonel commanded the Engineer Battalion of the 5th Brigade at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, one of the most strategic military installations in the United States. The 5th SFAB is a highly specialized brigade, created to work with foreign allied forces, assisting in the training and

development of military cooperation strategies. The brigade was one of the first to be established by the Pentagon with the aim of strengthening the United States' military presence in the Pacific, in response to China's growing influence in the region.

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The dismissal was the result of an internal investigation that uncovered highly inappropriate and unprofessional behavior. **The investigation examined hundreds of internal emails, voicemails, video recordings, and communications among members of her battalion.** In particular, the allegations against her involve episodes of sexual harassment and abuse towards soldiers under her command. One episode, in particular, raised concern: **the colonel allegedly forcibly kissed one of her male subordinates and groped another below the belt, without his consent.**

The Consequences and the Current Situation

Despite being removed from her command position, the colonel remains on active duty in the United States Army. She has been reassigned to the I Corps, based at the same Joint Base Lewis-McChord, **but there seems to be no evidence that she is facing a court-martial,** at least according to official information available to the public. Her situation is still uncertain, and it is currently unclear whether she has hired a lawyer to defend herself or if there are further legal proceedings against her. **This raises questions about the handling of sexual harassment and abuse cases within the armed forces, particularly when the accused**

are high-ranking officers.

The Investigation and Sexual Abuse Allegations

The allegations emerged after an investigation launched in April 2023, when Military.com first reported the news of her suspension from command. The investigation revealed that the officer had sexually abused at least two subordinates and sexually harassed other soldiers. These episodes were documented through a variety of evidence, including testimonies and internal communications.

According to sources with direct knowledge of the situation, some of the allegations involve **episodes that were allegedly linked to alcohol abuse**. This raises another important issue: the connection between substance abuse and abusive behavior by officers, which is often minimized or ignored within military institutions. In a high-pressure environment like the military, alcohol and drug abuse can have a devastating impact on the behavior of leaders and the dynamics among soldiers.

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Sexual Abuse Statistics in the Army and the Colonel's Case

The statistics on sexual abuse in the United States Army are concerning and highlight a difficult reality to address. According to 2022 Department of Defense data, male victims of sexual abuse account for about 10% of cases in the army. However, **the**

Pentagon believes these cases are under-reported, as men tend not to report abuse due to the social stigma surrounding the issue. Conversely, women make up about 6% of sexual harassment perpetrators, but this figure could also be underestimated, with most episodes coming from lower-ranking soldiers.

Women in higher command roles are extremely rare, making the case in question even more striking. The Colonel was the first woman to command a battalion of the 5th SFAB, a unit created between 2017 and 2020 with the task of working closely with foreign allied forces.

The Problem of Leadership and Power Dynamics in the Military Context

The colonel's case is not an isolated one, but fits into a broader context of leadership and management difficulties within the United States Army. The 5th SFAB has been the subject of an investigation that revealed numerous leadership-related issues, with some officers displaying authoritarian and ineffective behavior, creating a hostile work environment. **The brigade has faced moral and performance difficulties, with soldiers complaining about micromanagement and excessive pressure.**

In fact, in 2023, another commander of the 5th SFAB, the colonel, was dismissed following an investigation that highlighted similar power abuse behaviors, particularly the continuous reprimanding of soldiers and overly authoritarian management. This raises further questions about the quality of leadership within such specialized units and how power dynamics can negatively affect soldiers' morale and well-being.

The Armed Forces' Challenge Against Sexual Harassment and Power Abuse

The colonel's case and the investigations into the 5th SFAB also raise questions for the Italian armed forces. Although data on the United States armed forces are more comprehensive, it is important to ask whether similar phenomena could occur in Italy as well.

The Italian armed forces have implemented sexual harassment prevention policies, including courses promoting a culture of respect. Psychological support for victims has also been strengthened and safe channels for reporting abuse have been created. These tools are

essential for fair and timely handling of complaints, but it is crucial that they are continuously improved.

The growing presence of women in the Italian armed forces is contributing to changing military leadership, promoting an inclusive environment. However, preventing harassment requires a deep cultural change involving all levels, to prevent abuses from compromising the mission and trust among soldiers.

News link: https://www.military.com/daily-news/2024/01/23/female-commander-was-relieved-after-allegations-of-sexual-assaults-harassment-against-male.html