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Prepared Statement

of

The Honorable Charles S. Abell

Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense

(Personnel and Readiness)

Before the Terrorism Subcommittee

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DRAFT



Biography
Charles S. Abell
Principal Under Secretary of Defense
for Personnel and Readiness

. Charles S. Abell was appointed by the President as the Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness on November 15, 2002. A Presidential appointee confirmed by the Senate, he is the primary Assistant of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness providing staff advice to the Secretary of Defense and Deputy Secretary of the Defense for total force management as it relates to manpower; force structure; program integration; readiness; reserve component affairs; health affairs; training; and personnel requirements and management, including equal opportunity, morale, welfare, recreation, and quality of life matters.

Prior to his appointment as the Principal Deputy, Mr. Abell served as the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management Policy beginning on May 8, 2001. In this capacity he was responsible for policies, plans and programs for military and civilian personnel management, including recruitment, education, career development, equal opportunity, compensation, recognition, quality of life and separation of all Department of Defense personnel.

Before joining the Department of Defense, Mr. Abell served as a professional staff member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Mr. Abell joined the Armed Services Committee staff in 1993, after a 26-year career in the Army. He was the lead staffer for the Subcommittee on Personnel, responsible for issues concerning military readiness and quality of life. His responsibilities also encompassed manpower; pay and compensation; and personnel management issues affecting active duty, reserve and civilian personnel; and organization and functions within the Department of Defense.

In recent years, Mr. Abell has had the primary Committee responsibility for a broad array of important initiatives aimed at restoring cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) equity for military retirees and survivors; improving the military health care program; upgrading Survivor Benefit Plan coverage; and enhancing pay, allowances and retirement programs for active duty and reserve members and TRICARE for Life, guaranteeing all retirees coverage within TRICARE and the military health care system. He also worked on codification of the homosexual conduct policy and legislation concerning the assignment of women within the Department of Defense.

Mr. Abell entered active duty service as an enlisted soldier and concluded his Army career by retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel. He served two tours in Vietnam in various positions; Infantry Platoon Leader, Company Commander and Cobra Attack helicopter pilot. His career progressed through increasingly responsible positions at every level of Army operations. His decorations include the Legion of Merit, (2) Bronze Stars (Valor), Purple Heart, the Meritorious Service Medal (with four Oak Leaf Clusters), 14 Air Medals (two for Valor), the Army Commendation Medal (for Valor), and the Combat Infantryman's Badge. Mr. Abell holds a Master of Science from Columbus University in Human Resource Management and a Bachelor of Science in Political Science from the University of Tampa.

DRAFT

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman and members of this distinguished Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today and thank you for the chance to address you on the topic of officership and professionalism in the Armed Forces. There is no aspect of our officer corps more central to the success of the U. S. military, and this is true whether the officer be infantryman or aviator; chaplain, doctor or lawyer.

The levels of integrity and personal conduct required of an officer are high – and with good reason. Officers may be required to make decisions affecting millions of dollars. More importantly, their judgment and decisions may mean the difference between life and death for the troops with whom they serve. A ship’s captain literally holds the crew’s fate in his hands, while a lawyer in-theater reviewing the legality of proposed target selections during a ground campaign plays a similarly key role in ultimate mission success.

Recently, an Army officer, who is also a chaplain, after serving in Guantanamo was charged with violating regulations applicable to his duties. As a Department, charged with winning the nation’s wars, our concern is never about an individual’s specific religion. Our focus is on each individual’s personal security and reliability to uphold the commissioning oath he or she takes.

OFFICERSHIP

Active duty officers come from a variety of commissioning sources, including Service academies, the Reserve Officer Training Corps programs at colleges and universities, Officer Candidate Schools or Officer Training Schools of the Services, and direct appointment for physicians and other medical specialists, attorneys, and chaplains. These civilian professionals are accessed directly into the officer corps and then attend training that focuses on their role as commissioned officers.

Each military department has a chaplain corps, composed of highly qualified men and women who become members of the armed services in order to minister to

DRAFT

servicemembers and their families. A military chaplain can have hundreds or thousands of 'parishioners'. Chaplains go with the troops. Over 400 military chaplains have died in combat, and some even have made the ultimate sacrifice while prisoners of war.

Chaplains are commissioned officers. They take the same oath to support and defend the Constitution as their doctor, lawyer and line officer peers. No one is more familiar than a chaplain with the meaning of an oath. The word "sacrament" is, in fact, based on a Latin word which literally means "military oath" and comes from the pledge of Roman soldiers not to desert their standard, turn their back on the enemy, or abandon their general. As with other officers, chaplains traditionally reaffirm their oath of office upon assumption of a higher rank.

My emphasis on this point of the characteristics of an officer is by no means intended to minimize the importance of the professional training and religious certification which chaplain candidates must complete. I simply want to focus on the fact that chaplains, like members of the professions of law and medicine, must initially meet the very high standards of commissioned military service. A chaplain's commission is, in fact, a discretionary appointment, based as much on his or her officership qualities as on ministerial credentialing.

INSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS

There are basically three ways in which our system ensures that officers are accessed and retained based on their ability to meet standards. Those are professional credentialing, security clearances, and, once the officer is on active duty, monitoring of his or her performance.

Credentialing

I am aware that the issue of credentialing is of particular interest today. Again, I will begin with a review of the process for all officers.

DRAFT

To ensure quality, a college degree is a fundamental requirement for joining the officer corps. Officer candidate programs either demand a college degree or overwhelmingly select college graduates. In addition to educational requirements, the Services employ a variety of assessments to qualify candidates for overall commissioning standards as well as for assignment within specialties which require particular aptitudes, such as nuclear engineering or aviation.

The military's system for the procurement and training of commissioned officers is specially designed to obtain individuals of high quality. The emphasis on a college degree defines a select population from which officer candidates are drawn. Aptitude measures serve to identify those with the greatest potential for success. These selection methods are designed to facilitate the commissioning and retention of individuals with high aptitude, high leadership ability, and a high overall performance level.

In the case of professions such as law, medicine, and theology, there are additional credentialing requirements. These are not instead of, but in addition to, the standards required of any officer. We began revision of the Directive for credentialing chaplains almost a year ago, and this morning I signed a memorandum putting into effect its major provisions. This new guidance clarifies several Defense policies concerning prospective chaplains and, in particular, ensures that the Department stays out of the business of "approving" religious organizations.

Our standard for a qualifying organization begins with the evaluation already defined by the Federal government in awarding Internal Revenue Service (IRS) 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. The IRS review of religious organizations includes a requirement that the practices and rituals of such an organization are not illegal or against clearly defined public policy. Then, we verify that the organization supports a lay constituency and is prepared to submit a qualified applicant for consideration.

Finally, and most importantly, we do a thorough background investigation of the individual. I will outline the security screening process in just a moment, but first must mention the last standard required by the Directive: The chaplain candidate must be willing to provide a personal affirmation to support the First Amendment rights of the

DRAFT

entire eligible population – that is, the military members and their dependents – regardless of the chaplain’s faith or that of the individual the chaplain serves.

Security Clearances

The security screening of officer candidates is no less thorough than the review of their educational and professional credentials. Although there is some variation in the exact procedures used by the different Services, the primary vehicles are the Entrance National Agency Check, the National Agency Check, and the Local Agency Check with Credit Report all through the FBI and local agencies. More detailed reports are completed as indicated on a case-by-case basis. Applicants also complete the Electronic Personnel Security Questionnaire and must be qualified to hold a Secret clearance in order to receive a commission.

In addition, the Services verify citizenship and perform medical screening and evaluations to determine overall fitness to serve.

Monitoring

Finally, once on active duty, all officers – all military personnel – are continuously monitored in three ways: on-going evaluation by a supervisor, annual performance evaluations, and commander oversight. Each of these avenues, while possibly low key on a day-to-day basis, is a critical link in the chain of responsibility for enforcing performance standards.

To our regret, we know that pre-employment screening is not foolproof, whether it takes place in the public or the private sector. The military Services strive to enforce the highest standards of personal conduct and performance by both officers and enlisted personnel. Despite the best efforts of leadership, we are all aware of examples where individuals in all military occupational specialties fall short. It may be in relation to official duties, as in the theft of government property, or professional negligence by a physician or engineer, or it might be an off-duty offense such as assault or burglary.

DRAFT

While every such case is a tragedy for both the individual and the institution, we believe our system is designed to minimize these instances, and to maintain the high standards of personal ethics and behavior which we require.

Our commissioned military officers, in all fields and assignments, have consistently shown themselves to be the finest leaders and warriors in the world. Military chaplains are no exception. They have served with those fighting for the cause of freedom since the founding of our Nation, and served with distinction in support of the Nation's defense missions during every conflict in our history. Military chaplains currently serve in humanitarian operations, rotational deployments, and in the war on terrorism both at home and abroad.

CONCLUSION

People continue to be our most vital resource—certainly they are the most critical component of readiness. The intense demands we place on them require highly motivated, highly skilled, professional servicemembers. Currently, we have a total force of over 2.3 million men and women serving around the world who have sworn to protect our freedoms with their very lives, if necessary. Over 4,800 military chaplains are serving with them, meeting the needs of our troops who may worship God in different ways or not at all.

The chaplain's primary role of providing for the Constitutional right of the Free Exercise of Religion is absolutely vital. Through their role as both spiritual minister and staff member, chaplains bring a unique perspective to the health of a unit. Various studies have concluded that religion and spirituality are powerful factors in battling stress. By ministering to the spiritual health of Servicemembers and their families, the officers serving within the Chaplain Service provide a highly effective means for dealing with such stress. In a time of frequent deployments, often involving non-traditional missions, in areas of the world where religious conflict prevails, these officers are especially important members of the commander's staff.

DRAFT

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to address the Subcommittee and to express appreciation to the Subcommittee for your support for the men and women of the Department of Defense.