

Office of Marine Corps Communications Public Affairs Guidance *Marines United*

1. References

- (a) Message to the Force 2017: “Seize the Initiative”
- (b) Office of Marine Corps Communication Summary of *Marines United* Incident, Feb. 20, 2017
- (c) Marine Corps Social Media Handbook
- (d) Uniformed Code of Military Justice
- (e) Letter from Gen. Amos to Rep. Speier, May 29, 2013
- (f) MARADMIN 365/10: “Social Media Guidance – Unofficial Internet Posts”

2. Background (Not for Release)

2.1. In Feb. 2017, an investigative journalist and former Marine infantryman informed Marine Office of Marine Corps Public Affairs of his intent to publish a story exposing a closed Facebook group, *Marines United*, where members solicited for explicit photos of female service members. Subsequently, the images were posted to a Google Drive, the link provided to members of the closed Facebook page. Some women depicted on the Google Drive are identified as Marines, some by name, rank and duty station. The Google Drive, which is a secure cloud storage and file backup for photos and videos, was maintained by a former Marine. The Google Drive has since been removed from the World Wide Web. The *Marines United* group has a following of 30K. The Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) has recently opened an investigation into the posting of explicit photographs. The journalist’s draft story is focused on *Marines United*, particularly the misogynistic behavior and comments on the site. The article is expected to cite challenges with misogynistic behavior other organizations have faced, such as the U.S. Secret Service.

2.2. *Historical Precedence (2013)*: As noted in reference (e), the Marine Corps was criticized by Congressional leadership in 2013 for individual Marines’ participation in similar sites. Then Commandant, Gen Amos, responded by outlining the ways that the Marine Corps currently faces the challenges with social media via its policies, training requirements, employment of the Marine Corps Cybersecurity Assessment Team, and duties of Trademark and Licensing office.

2.3. *Historical Precedence (2014)*: On 20 Aug 2014, Task & Purpose published an article detailing Marine social media misconduct. Following its publication, members of OMCC Digital Engagement Team briefly mined Facebook and identified 12 additional Marines allegedly linked to racist, sexist, and/or otherwise inappropriate social media misconduct. Information about these incidents were provided to unit commanders for appropriate action.

3. Communication Approach and Public Affairs Posture.

3.1. Assessment of the Information Environment: Based off historical precedence, once the story publishes, national outlets will write their own stories and Congressional Members will request briefs on how the Corps will handle this situation. Media may request to speak with Marine leaders at the headquarters and local, Major Subordinate Command levels. The story will likely spark shares and discussions across social media, offering venues for Marines and former Marines who may victim blame, i.e., “they shouldn’t have taken the photos in the first place,” or bemoan that they believe the Corps is becoming soft or politically correct. Concern from Congress about the Marines Corps’ treatment of women across the force may be a topic of discussion. Combined, these articles may 1) may negatively impact perceptions among female Marines of leadership’s ability to address these situations, 2) spark criticism from nonprofit groups that advocate on behalf of female service members, 3) require communication to Congress in terms of how the Corps intends to handle these situations and what deliberate actions that it will take in the future, and 4) negatively impact the Corps’ reputation among segments of the American public.

3.2. Public Affairs Posture:

3.3. Prior to publication: The public affairs posture is respond to query (RTQ), meaning that the media will not yet be contacted proactively on this topic; however, Office of Marine Corps Communication (OMCC), will continue to coordinate with the journalist who plans to publish the story. Synchronization of the Marine Corps message/guidance with the publication of the story is paramount. OMCC will continue to coordinate internal communication actions with the Director of Marine Corps Staff (DMCS) and finalize the communication plan following publication of the story.

3.4. Following publication: The public affairs posture following the publication of this story is *active*. OMCC will retain lead on communication. Subordinate commands should forward all queries to ontherecord@usmc.mil. HQMC staff sections are asked to support OMCC in identifying, in advance, subject matter experts (SMEs) for the following topics: 1) gender integration, 2) sexual assault and harassment, 3) training of Marines, 4) negative effects of misogyny, 5) equal opportunity training, and 6) social media training.

3.4.1. DMCS serves as the overall lead for the coordination and execution of staff communication actions with key stakeholders.

3.4.2. Commanders and PAOs must also be prepared to support any Marines who think they are

affected by this incident, as some may be contacted by media about their story. To ensure transparency and credibility of the Corps, Marines should not be forbidden from telling their story; however, they should be offered resources and guidance from legal as speaking publicly could affect potential future legal proceedings. No Marine should comment with any specifics regarding ongoing investigations. Questions about a pending/ongoing investigation will be directed to NCIS PAO (contact info on page 10).

3.4.3. The Marines Corps must be prepared to discuss, if requested, the ongoing efforts to combat discrimination through Equal Opportunity training, as well as efforts to combat sexual assault and sexual harassment in the Corps.

3.5. Communication Tactics: OMCC has the lead on executing the following actions, synchronized with the publication of the story:

3.5.1. OMCC Digital Engagement Team provides supporting content to reinforce any distributed guidance as well as messages that complement communication efforts.

3.5.2. Be prepared to conduct a media roundtable, on order, to show the efforts the Marine Corps took upon notification; the legal options available should behavior be reported; and resources available for potential victims affected.

4.0. Public Statements

4.1 The following statement was provided to the journalist on 24 Feb 2017 prior to publication and will be incorporated into future communication:

“The Marine Corps is deeply concerned about allegations regarding the derogatory online comments and sharing of salacious photographs in a closed website. This behavior destroys morale, erodes trust, and degrades the individual. The Marine Corps does not condone this sort of behavior, which undermines our core values. As General Neller said in his recent Message to the Force, the Marine Corps’ success in battle depends on trust, mutual respect, and teamwork.

The Marine Corps takes every allegation of misconduct seriously. Allegations of misconduct are thoroughly investigated and handled at the appropriate judicial or administrative forum. A Marine could potentially be charged for violating Article 133 (for officers) or Article 134 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). If a Marine shared a photo of another person that was taken without that person’s consent and under circumstances in which that other person had a reasonable expectation of privacy, the Marine may have violated Article 120c, UCMJ, for broadcasting or distribution of an indecent visual recording. A Marine who directly participates in, encourages, or condones such actions could also be subjected to criminal proceedings or adverse administrative actions.

The Marine Corps has a variety of resources available to individuals who believe they may be

affected by this type of behavior. In addition to the chain of command, resources include, but are not limited to: Military One Source, Inspector General hotlines and military chaplains. Individuals can also report the incident to local authorities. Efforts are underway to notify commanders and other resource providers about the incident to ensure they are aware.”

4.2. “Based off information provided by the journalist, The Naval Criminal Investigative Service has opened an investigation.”

4.3. Key leader statement: Being finalized.

5.0. **Themes, Messages and Talking Points.**

5.1. Keeping Faith/Victim Support.

5.1.1. Key Message: The Marine Corps is committed to taking care of our Marines. We are prepared to support Marines affected by activity on *Marines United* and those who may seek legal or other support.

5.1.2. Supporting Facts:

- The Marine Corps is prepared to support Marines affected by activity on *Marines United* and those who may seek legal or other support. All resource providers have been educated on the situation and are prepared to support Marines.
- Resource providers throughout the fleet were notified on 1 March 2017.
- The chaplain and the Victims’ Legal Counsel Organization are available to support Marines affected who want to maintain privacy.
- The online activity alleged on *Marines United* not only impacts good order and discipline but degrades those targeted on the site.

5.2. Accountability.

5.2.1. Key message: The Marine Corps takes every allegation of misconduct seriously and we will hold individuals responsible for discriminatory and discrediting actions.

5.2.2. Supporting facts:

- Upon notification of the existence of the Google Drive, Marine Corps took action and access to the site was immediately restricted.
- The Marine Corps will continue to support NCIS in their ongoing investigation. The investigation is in support of two individuals affected by postings on the *Marines United* site.
- We expect Marines to speak up and speak out when it comes to any behavior that seeks to demean or degrade others. Don’t let silence be consent.
- A Marine who is proven to post an explicit photo of another person could potentially be charged for violating Article 133 (for officers) or Article 134 of the Uniform Code of

Military Justice (UCMJ). If a Marine shared a photo of another person that was taken without that person's consent and under circumstances in which that other person had a reasonable expectation of privacy, the Marine could potentially be charged with a violation of Article 120c, UCMJ, for broadcasting or distribution of an indecent visual recording.

- A Marine who directly participates in, encourages, or condones such actions could also be subjected to criminal proceedings or adverse administrative actions.

5.3. Marine Ethos.

5.3.1. Key Message: Marines, by and large, possess and act in accordance with the values of honor courage and commitment, but *we must do a better job looking out for each other*. The misogynistic behavior demonstrated on *Marines United* Facebook Page is not reflective of the U.S. Marine Corps' values. We do not condone behavior that degrades or demeans any person.

5.3.2. Supporting Facts:

- Marines are expected to maintain their commitment to one another and treat one another with dignity and respect.
- The Commandant's recent guidance explicitly directs Marines to value and respect the dignity of all Marines, and to protect and motivate each other.

5.4. Social Media.

5.4.1. Key Message: Social media is a valuable communication method that unfortunately provides an opportunity for individuals to publicize content that is distasteful, harmful to others, and discrediting to our organization.

5.4.2. Supporting Facts:

- MARADMIN 365/10 provides guidance for Marines regarding online behavior.
- Although social media training and guidance already exists, the Marine Corps reviews current content and ongoing use of the program to determine if more guidance is warranted or more clarity on what behaviors are not acceptable. Our guidance was recently updated in August 2016.
- At this time, there is social media training incorporated into the annual operational security training required by all Marines. The training, however, focuses on operational security and does not directly address all potential online behaviors.
- The Marine Corps drafted a social media handbook in 2010, updated in August 2016, and requires that Marines are educated on the policies in place.
- Per the guidance, Marines are told to avoid offensive and inappropriate behavior that could bring discredit upon themselves and the Marine Corps. This includes posting anything that is defamatory, libelous, obscene, abusive, threatening, racially or ethnically hateful, or otherwise offensive or illegal information or material.

6. Questions and Answers.

Q1: What guidance has been passed to the resource providers across the Marine Corps to address the behavior seen on *Marines United* and support potential victims? (as of 1 March—what will be the intent)

A1: The Marine Corps existing support structure provides many avenues for Service members, their dependents, and civilians to make a complaint, seek information or referral, or access advocacy services:

- If a Marine believes he/she is a victim of a crime and wants to maintain privacy, he/she may reach out to the chaplain or a Victim Legal Counsel;
- Services available to a Marine who is affected by *Marines United*, to include: chaplains, Victim Legal Counsel, Behavioral Health Counselors, Sexual Assault Response Coordinators, Sexual Assault Victim Advocates, Chain of Command, NCIS, Local Law Enforcement, Inspector General, Equal Opportunity Advisors, Victim Witness Assistant Coordinators, and Military OneSource;
- Service members and civilians can report a crime or pass information on *Marines United* to NCIS via text, the web, or the NCIS smart phone app. All of these methods offer service members and civilians a safe, discreet, and anonymous option to report criminal and force protection threats within the USN and USMC:
<http://www.ncis.navy.mil/ContactUs/Pages/ReportaCrime.aspx> or (877) 579-3648. We further recommend the local Inspector General as a resource in reporting issues related to “*Marines United*.”

Q2: To date, has the Marine Corps considered adding online derogatory behavior to training? Is it a consideration based of this latest incident?

A2: Marine Corps policy is clear – any form of harassment, discrimination, or hazing is not tolerated and is inconsistent with our core values, and impedes our ability to perform our mission. This policy is also punitive in nature which allows commanders appropriate mechanisms to administer judicial or non-judicial punishment in sexual harassment cases. Behaviors that rise to the level of sexual harassment, whether conducted person-to-person, online or any other method, are covered by this policy. The Marine Corps continually reviews its training to ensure it is relevant and current -- our EO training is no different.

Q3: How does the Marine Corps assess issues that affect Marine females, and what have been the trends in the past five years? (Annual climate surveys).

A3: Commanders use information gleaned from climate surveys and other means to help identify emerging issues within their units. We continuously look to improve our data collection efforts to better understand the scope of harassment of any kind within the Marine Corps. We routinely explore options to make data more actionable for commanders and policy makers that support our prevention efforts.

Q4: How many EO complaints based off gender discrimination were filed annually in the past five years?

A4: The Marine Corps assesses issues that affect all Marines, including those specific to female Marines, through the Defense equal Opportunity Management Institute Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS). DEOCS results suggest that female Marines' perceptions of command climate issues specific to sexual assault prevention and response are more positive than in previous years. Data from this survey allows commanders to assess aspects of their command climate, such as perceptions of equal opportunity and sexual assault response and prevention. Here are the numbers of EO complaints for the past 5 years:

2012 - 0

2013 - 7

2014 - 0

2015 - 3

2016 - Data is currently being analyzed.

Q5: How many cases of sexual harassment have been filed in the past five years and is the reporting/number of incidents getting better or worse?

A5: All Marines who experience sexual harassing behaviors are encouraged to report the behavior immediately to the chain of command. However, there remains a disparity between those who file a formal allegation of sexual harassment with the command and those who reported having experienced sexual harassing behaviors via the DEOCS survey. The following are the totals of *substantiated* complaints of sexual harassment received in the past 5 years:

2012 - 29

2013 - 35

2014 - 28

2015 - 18

2016 - Data is currently being analyzed

Q6: Are Marines taught (in EO training or elsewhere) to identify and report misogynistic behaviors, specifically behavior attacking fellow Marines?

A6: Misogyny, at its root, is prejudice against a group, and Marines are expected to report such behavior. Marines receive EO training annually which includes education on policy, and the effects of discrimination and sexual harassment on the individual Marine, the unit, morale and mission accomplishment as required by DOD policy.

Q7: Does current training address or set expectations/guidance deterring misogyny? Is it covered in EO training or sexual harassment training?

A7: Misogyny, at its root, is prejudice against a group, and Marines are expected to report such behavior. As such, misogyny is covered in Equal Opportunity training related to prejudice. Training and education is the foundation of the Marine Corps' sexual harassment prevention efforts. Leadership, accountability, and strong sexual harassment policies and formal complaint systems are essential components of a successful prevention strategy, but only if Marines are aware of them. The Marine Corps requires, and conducts, annual sexual harassment training for all Marines on organizational rules, policies, procedures, and expectations, as well as the

consequences of misconduct.

Q8: Although there is no evidence that Sexual Assaults are linked to behavior on *Marines United*, it is alleged that a violation of privacy, sexual in nature, has occurred. Is there a recommendation on how potential victims should report, or the types of services that are needed?

A8: The Marine Corps' existing support structure provides many avenues for service members, their dependents, and civilians to make a complaint, seek information or referral, or access advocacy services. While not an exhaustive list, resources include the Chain of Command, Military One Source, Inspector General Hotlines, and military chaplains. For those potential victims that would like to maintain privacy, it is recommended that they contact Victim's Legal Counsel.

Q9: What actions have been taken against the Marines involved in the Facebook Page and Google Drive? Have the victims been notified?

A9: NCIS has opened investigations relating to Marines who were affected by posting on *Marines United*. It is not our policy to discuss ongoing investigations as it may compromise the investigative processes. Please refer any requests for information about the investigation to NCIS.

Q10: Is there precedent in the DoD for a case like this?

A10: In 2013, Rep. Jackie Speier (D-Calif.) sent a letter to Secretary Hagel and top military officials about a Facebook page that denigrated women in the Marine Corps. Facebook removed the page May 8, 2013.

Q11: Is the Marine Corps Inspector General monitoring these sites?

A11: The Marine Corps IG's office monitors complaints but not necessarily the websites themselves. Citizens still maintain the inherent right to Freedom of Speech which protects most expressions found on public websites, regardless of how distasteful or repugnant. However, any incident reported to us in which a Marine is alleged to have violated regulations is quickly acted upon.

Q12: What happens when someone makes a complaint to the IG's hotline?

A12: We take all complaints seriously and, upon receiving a complaint regarding derogatory comments by Marines, we immediately initiate appropriate actions.

Q13: Are there any ongoing cases involving distribution or broadcasting of indecent photos?

A13: While there are a certain number of prosecutions using Article 120c, it is unknown how many involve distribution or broadcasting of indecent pictures that were taken without the consent of the other person and under circumstances in which that other person had a reasonable expectation of privacy. For questions about ongoing investigations into Article 120c violations, please refer any requests for information to NCIS.

Q14: How should someone notify proper authorities about derogatory sites?

A14: We continually advise individuals who inform us about offensive, derogatory or

threatening issues on social media sites to alert the website's administrators and report the offense to the Marine Corps IG Complaint Hotline.

Q15: Has a Marine ever been prosecuted for violating Article 120c, UCMJ, for broadcasting or distributing indecent photos?

A15: Yes.

Q16. Do Marine judge advocates have the training and tools they need to prosecute violations of Article 120c, UCMJ?

A16. Yes.

Q17. Who does the Marine Corps rely on to enforce behavior online?

A17: Primarily, leadership and education are the first line of defense when it comes to any behavior that is not in keeping with our values. Our policies for online behavior are clear -- Marines are responsible for all content they publish on social networking sites, blogs or other websites. As with other forms of personal public engagement, Marines should avoid offensive and inappropriate behavior that could bring discredit upon themselves and the Marine Corps. In their behavior online, as with other types of behavior, Marines are primarily responsible for policing themselves and their fellow Marines. Marines are instructed that, if they come across a Marine violating the UCMJ or command policy on social media platforms, they should respond in the same manner they would if they witnessed the infraction in any other environment.

Q18: Does the Marine Corps actively seek websites that post derogatory content and discredit the Marine Corps?

A18: The Marine Corps has limited ability to censor derogatory or service-discrediting speech and other content on public websites, to include social media. Similarly, the Marine Corps has limited ability to enforce its social media policies due to the anonymous nature of the Internet, frequent uses of closed or secret groups, fake names, and large number of social media outlets.

7. PA Planning Instructions and Command Relationships.

7.1. OMCC will facilitate social media monitoring and engagement to identify reputational threats and determine appropriate follow-on engagement across specific social media platforms (or individual posts). MSCs (or Marines) who identify social media threads or platforms that are promoting significant inflammatory/derogatory remarks or misinformation about how we make Marines should coordinate with OMCC to determine engagement.

7.2. OMCC will conduct overall media monitoring and analytics of pre and post publication, tracking following keywords, to include: Marines United; Misogyny; Gender Challenges; Sexism; Sexual harassment; Revenge porn; Victim advocacy; Accountability; Gender Integration; Females in Combat; Sexual harassment; Sexual Assault; and SAPR.

8. Media Operations.

8.1. Media engagements must be routed through OMCC for approval until indicated otherwise.

8.2. MSCs are authorized to develop and produce internal information products and content designed to educate key publics about appropriate online behavior.

8.3. Marine Corps web and social media properties are encouraged to promote and share information developed at OMCC and distributed via social media sites.

9. Points of Contact.

9.1. OMCC: Capt. Ryan E. Alvis, Work: 703-614-4309, Cell: 202-302-7393, E-mail: ryan.alvis@usmc.mil

9.2. NCIS Public Affairs: Ed Buice, Work: 571-305-9070, Cell: 202-359-2253, E-mail: ed.buice@ncis.navy.mil

9.3. TECOM Public Affairs Officer, Capt. Josh Pena, Work: 703-432-8164, Cell: 703-595-3795, E-mail: joshua.penal@usmc.mil

9.4. MCRD Parris Island Public Affairs Officer, Capt. Greg Carroll, Work: 843-228-3710, Cell: 843-441-2160, E-mail: gregory.carroll@usmc.mil

9.5. Manpower & Reserve Affairs Public Affairs Officers, Maj. Garron J. Garn, Work: 703-784-9047; BB: 571-289-7084, E-mail: garron.garn@usmc.mil