

# *Rebuttal*

*by Frederick Wickert*

It is personal. I admit it. I spent twenty years in our armed forces and I am proud of it and I am proud of our military. When someone bashes them, it gets under my skin. I have had my run-ins with both the military and with the Veterans Administration. I know others that also have. I know that not everything is perfect with the military and I know that wrongs are committed.

There are hundreds of thousands of men and women serving in our armed forces. A few of them are bad. Most are not. To paint them all with the same brush and condemning the entire military for the sins of a few to me is wrong, and I resent it. I know that the good outweighs the bad many times over.

Ourecho story ID# 3417, titled "military, patriotism and cover-up," by Bobby O'Niell Mitchum spewed streams of venom against the military and accused it of the cover up of rape and sexual abuse among its ranks as a habitual practice.

In the comments section I took exception to the military being painted that way. I carried on a discussion with the author in the comments section and finally concluded I was getting nowhere with him on the subject.

I mentioned in those comments a Lt. Col. had just been sentenced to prison for rape and sex abuse. The author brushed it aside. He gave it no weight in my argument at all. I know that there have been a number of prosecutions and there have been some wide spread investigations into such cases. I believe that gives evidence that Mr. Mitchum is wrong in his assessment.

Again, I do not deny that sometimes such things as he alleges do occur. I do deny in the strongest terms that it is policy and it is the rule rather than the exception. Mr. Mitchum alleges that my blind and misplaced patriotism has blinded me to the truth. Again, I have to disagree. My patriotism is neither blind, nor has it prevented me from recognizing the truth.

As evidence to support my assertions I offer the following:

I served in security and law enforcement in the military for twenty years. As police, it was we who received complaints and reports of sex abuse and rape. For a major portion of the time I served I was both a supervisor privy to what was going on more than most of the men were, and I also performed many of the investigations of criminal offenses. There were a few isolated cases of sexual abuse and fewer cases of rape. They were investigated and they were prosecuted. There were no "cover ups," but for the protection of the victims, they were kept confidential.

I have currently, five members of my family – all grand nephews, serving in the military. Two of them are in the Air Force and three of them are in the Army. Two of those in the Army are currently serving in Iraq on their second tour there. To the best of my knowledge, none of them have related any knowledge of any such misconduct in their units and among their particular outfits. It seems likely to me that if such had occurred they might have mentioned it to their immediate families. They have not.

It was earlier mentioned that a Lt. Col. Was sentenced for rape. There was a two-month long courts martial, in which a Lt. Col., also a Chaplain, had had sexual relations with some men, coerced by his position and rank, and had actually raped three men. His trial was concluded in December of 2007 and he was sentenced to a dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of all pays and allowances, levied a fine and given twenty years in a federal penitentiary.

I receive on a daily basis, news updates from the Air Force Times newspaper. In today's news updates, (February 7, 2008) the following article appeared:

**SHEPPARD COLNEL CHARGED WITH RAPE, LARCENY**

By Michael Hoffman, Staff Writer, posted Thursday, Feb. 7, 2008 19:34:32.

(For those unfamiliar with military time, that means 7:34 and 32 seconds P.M.)

Col. Samuel Loftin III has been charged with rape and 29 other counts following an investigation that started after he was relieved of command of the 82nd Training Group on May 30.

An article 32 hearing is scheduled to start Monday morning at the U.S. Military Courthouse at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, home of the 82nd.

For those unfamiliar with military law, an Article 32 hearing is equivalent to the civilian Grand Jury. If the hearing finds there is sufficient evidence, the Col. will be tried for his crimes by courts martial.

A Sheppard AFB spokesman said the charge sheet for Loftin couldn't be released because of privacy concerns. I have been a civilian police chief for five years. I can tell you that it is policy in civilian law as well as military law for the protection of the victims. It is not done as a cover-up.

The Sheppard spokesman also made the following statement:

"The Air Force holds all of its members, regardless of rank or position, to a very high standard and takes allegations of sexual misconduct and other illegal behavior seriously. We are also committed to protecting the rights of the alleged victims."

Col. Loftin was a Group Commander in the 80th Flight Training Wing. A Group consists of two or more squadrons. He was in a very high position. The next step if promoted is Brigadier General. The one sentenced in December was both a Chaplain and a Lt. Col.

If there were going to be any cover up, surely officers in these two positions merited the cover up, but it didn't happen. If they are not covering up for these two officers of high positions, they are most assuredly not going to be covering up for those in the lower ranks.

The Air Force Times has published a number of sexual cases that have been tried and the offenders punished in recent months. These have included rape, sexual abuse, pornography, and in one case, carnal knowledge of a 16 year old. Some have been officers and some enlisted people. Some have been in the USA and some have been in foreign countries.

To me, that is not covering up. Not only are these cases being prosecuted, but they are also being published. The military is trying to do the right thing. Are they perfect? Of course they are not. Do some things get past them? Of course they do. In many cases that is because there is not sufficient evidence to prosecute. In that case, it is not their fault. The same thing is true with civilian populations and law enforcement. I believe they try to do the right thing.

I believe there is sufficient evidence to show that painting the military with the broad brush used by Mr. Mitchum is unjustified.