



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HQ, 101ST EXPEDITIONARY SIGNAL BATTALION
KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, AFGHANISTAN
APO AE 09355

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

AF-SCBAF-TFSA-CH

31 January 2013

MEMORANDUM FOR COMMANDER, 311th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary),
Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, APO AE 09355

SUBJECT: Rebuttal for General Officer Memorandum of Reprimand: Chaplain (1LT)
Christopher J. Antal

1. Sir, I sincerely regret that you have to divert your attention from the mission of our Command to address the Memorandum of Reprimand. I apologize that the allegations against me have become a distraction to you and to our unit. However, for the reasons stated below, I respectfully request that the Memorandum of Reprimand be rescinded or, in the alternative, be filed in my local unit personnel file.

2. As a new U.S. Army Officer, I have learned an important lesson from the investigation and the subsequent Memorandum of Reprimand: right intent with wrong execution can heed unwanted consequences. I apologize for posting a religious rite confession used as part of my congregational liturgy on a church website where the words, together with my photo in uniform and military title, were misunderstood by some as a "politically inflammatory message." From the beginning back in November 2012, I apologized to my Battalion Commander, COL Greg Dreisbach, acknowledging in hindsight that the confession may be misinterpreted as being political which is not what my intention was.

3. My intentions were never to discredit my unit, my command or the U.S. Army or to disregard U.S. Army values. During my initial training as a chaplain, I was taught that Army Regulation (AR) 165-1, Army Chaplain Corps Activities, para. 3-3a authorizes chaplains to "speak with a prophetic voice" against issues of "moral turpitude in conflict with Army Values." In writing the confession and placing it on a religious website, my goal was to expose moral problems for the sake of principles. "Moral Courage," according to Rushworth Kidder's book by that name which I was required to read at the U.S. Army Chaplain School in 2009, means standing up for principles, at great personal risk. Whether or not one agrees with the content of my confession, through exposing problems, I intended to demonstrate moral courage and take a stand for Spirituality, Accountability, Compassion, Religious Leadership, and Excellence - the guiding values of the Chaplain Corps.

4. However, in retrospect, I understand now the need to be more cautious and mindful of my status as an U.S. Army Officer. Although many people, as demonstrated in the enclosed letters, found the confession to be healing and helpful, I learned that my religious confession could be taken out of context especially in the age of the Internet and digital communications.

5. There are also some matters which I want to clarify regarding my actions which may have been misportrayed or misconstrued by the AR 15-6 Investigation:

a. Any claim that I was “initially reluctant to take the blog down” is simply not true (Exhibit 3 of the Investigation). I consulted Eric Durr, Public Affairs Officer (Exhibit 29 of the Investigation) before posting on my church website with my photo in uniform and military title. The site was up for two months before anyone in my command noticed. As soon as my Command expressed concern, I asked, “What do you want me to do?” I was told that I had a right to my belief, but the Command wanted me to remove my photo and military title from the site. I immediately took steps to remove not only my photo and military title but also all my blogs on the site. I was never “reluctant to take the article down” as my Command has claimed.

b. With regards to “Deceiving your chain of command.” There is no factual foundation for such an allegation. I have been forthright to my chain of command and have voluntarily provided answers and information throughout the investigative process. The only time I withheld information from my chain of command was regarding the personally identifying details of the service member I went to support on my trip to Camp Leatherneck on 8 October 2012. I did not disclose the identity of the person I wanted to visit due to my obligations to protect privileged and confidential clergy-client and clergy-colleague information pursuant to:

i. Army Regulation (AR) 165-1, Army Chaplain Corps Activities, para. 16-2 and Uniform Code of Military Justice, Military Rule of Evidence 503.

ii. Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association (UUMA) Guidelines for the Conduct of Ministry, which includes a Covenant, a Code of Conduct, and Standards for Professional Practice. (I am accountable to these Guidelines, and if I violate them, I risk losing my endorsement and cannot function as a minister or as a chaplain.) I am accountable to the Covenant “to support one another in collegial respect and care;” I am accountable to the Code of Conduct (within the limitations of the law) to “respect the confidentiality of private communications from those to whom I minister” and to “respect confidences given me by colleagues;” I am also accountable to the Code of Conduct to “seek consultation among my colleagues practicing the diverse forms of parish-based and community-based ministry within the same geographical area.” Finally, I am accountable to the Standards of Professional Practice to engage in collegial relationships that are “professionally sensitive, respectful, and supportive.”

c. What I said was truthful in regards to my trip to Camp Leatherneck. I said that I was the only Army Unitarian Universalist (UU) Chaplain in Afghanistan who could provide denominational support to a fellow UU member at Camp Leatherneck. I did not disclose that the fellow UU member was a Navy UU chaplain who was suffering from emotional distress because of Army Regulation cited above and UUMA Guidelines to “respect confidences given me by colleagues.” I went to Leatherneck “to support one another in collegial respect and care” and seek consultation from my only UU colleague in Afghanistan. This visit was requested and sanctioned by the Reverend Sarah Lammert, Director of Ministries and Faith Development Ecclesiastical Endorser for the UU denomination.

6. Do I “possess the qualities required for continued service?” – I defer to the letters of support enclosed with this memorandum. I have a solid record of effective ministry during my twenty months with the 101st ESB, to include my four months here in Afghanistan. Claims that I am “not approachable” by Commanders in the 101st ESB do not explain the counseling case load I have (an average of 15 per week from the 101 ESB), or feedback, such as one given by a soldier in my care, who said “I feel like I can tell you anything without you judging me.” As a religious leader from a low-density faith group, my services have extended beyond the unit to include my area of operations and denominational coverage. I have provided much needed religious support to an underserved population throughout Southern Afghanistan ever since I arrived in September 2012.

7. Regarding the recommendation by the Investigation Officer for REFRAD so I “may receive additional training and mentorship from the NYARNG Chaplain Corps leadership,” I say this: as a lieutenant officer and chaplain from a low-density faith group, I need leaders who can guide, mentor and support me. I admit I need to grow into my role as a staff officer, but that will come with good mentoring. I am delighted to find senior chaplains and officers in the Regular Army here in Afghanistan willing and able to mentor and guide me. CH (LTC) Greg Walker, the RC (S) Division Chaplain, CH (MAJ) Robert Miller, my Supervising Chaplain, and CH (LTC) Tammie Crews have all offered to mentor and train me here in Afghanistan. This kind of opportunity for growth is not available to me in New York.

8. In conclusion, I have learned a valuable lesson of accountability and situational awareness when it comes to the words that I convey. Your Memorandum of Reprimand will be forever etched in my heart and remind me of my role as a U.S. Army Officer. Therefore, I respectfully request that you rescind the Memorandum of Reprimand, or in the alternative, file it in my local unit personnel file, so it does not impact on my abilities to continue to serve in the U.S. Army. Moreover, I respectfully request that you order that I remain with my unit until the end of my tour to serve as chaplain to the Soldiers who need my counseling services, especially in the areas of suicide prevention.

AF-SCBAF-TFSA-CH

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9. The point of contact for this memorandum is the undersigned at:

chris.j.antal@afghan.swa.army.mil and DSN 318 421-7074.

////Original Signed////

Encls

1. Memo from MAJ Sean Park,
2. Memo from LTC Marc Saphir,
3. Memo from LTC Glenn Lapoint,
4. Memo from 1LT Lyndsey Lyons,
5. Letter from CH (COL) Paul Dodd,
6. Letter from Rev. Meg Riley,
7. Letter from Rev. Sarah Lammert,
8. Letter from Dr. Ed Tick,
9. Memo from CH (MAJ) Miller,
10. Memo from CH (LTC) Tammie Crews,
11. Letter from Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull,
12. Letter from Bob LaVallee,
13. Letter from Stanley Hyman,
14. Letter from CH (COL) Herman Keizer, retired,
15. Letter from Rev. Dr. Paul Rasor,
16. Letter from Dr. Kent Hoffman,
17. Memo from SPC Anthony Taylor,
18. Letter from Jasmine Chopra-Delgadillo,
19. Letter from Paula Griffin,
20. Letter from Mark Timpany,
21. Letter from Bruce Langley,
22. Memo from CH (COL) Mike Lembke,
23. Letter from MAJ Mark Rhodes,
24. Letter from Larry Shook,
25. Letter from Col John Talbott, USAF, retired,
26. Letter from Sr. Maureen Mitchell,
27. Letter from The McKinnons,
28. Letter from Tim Connor,
29. Letter from John Hancock,
30. Letter from Lynda Marin,
31. Letter from Hugh Scanlen,
32. Letter from John Bach,
33. Memo from CH (MAJ) Susan Caswell.

CHRISTOPHER J. ANTAL
1LT, CH
Battalion Chaplain