



National Association for Uniformed Services®

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The Servicemember's Voice in Government

Established in 1968



February 16, 2010

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John McCain
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Levin and Ranking Member McCain:

On behalf of the National Association for Uniformed Services (NAUS), I write to encourage your thorough oversight of the investigation into the circumstances surrounding the shootings at Fort Hood, Texas, and as you prepare to hold hearings, NAUS asks your consideration of our initial thoughts on the events leading to the deadly incident.

On Nov. 5, 2009, Major Nidal Malik Hasan, a military physician, killed 13 people and wounded 30 others in a shooting spree at the Fort Hood military base. The panel investigating the incident, led by former Army Secretary Togo West and Navy Admiral Vern Clark, reported that the Army mishandled warnings on the poor performance and radical views of Major Hasan. Secretary Gates indicated that several officers who supervised Major Hasan during his psychiatric training in the Washington area may be disciplined.

While accountability of those who allowed Major Hasan to continue his medical training is critical, perhaps more critical in the emergence of this terrorism is the discovery of the missed signals that allowed Major Hasan to carry out his deadly plan. The holes in our security procedures must be countered and filled, as best we can, to protect our country, our servicemembers and our citizens.

How can we prevent such a tragedy in the future?

As has been reported, Major Hasan, training to become an Army Psychiatrist, often demonstrated radical anti-American views and provided a continuous substandard performance over a long period of time. Punishing the several officers who supervised Major Hasan may draw attention to the seriousness of this failure in leadership, but it would not, repeat, not solve the problem exemplified by Major Hasan.

One of the first actions that should be taken is the institution of procedures that strengthen clearance procedures given to military medical professionals. A more rigorous security clearance procedure beginning before entrance into military medical training is needed. Individuals should be asked about "issues" or concerns that might pose a conflict of interest, or otherwise interfere with faithful service, or prevent them serving the United States in military assignments at home and overseas.

Specifically, candidates to a military medical profession should be asked if there are conflicts of interest or other problems that could be attributed to an individual's political views, religion, ethnicity, place of birth or one's philosophy that might conflict with the capability to deploy in service.

The importance of accurate Officer Efficiency Reports needs to be stressed Army-wide in both training and directives.

In addition, periodic updates to security clearances for military medical professionals should revisit such questions during Medical School, during residency and during advanced training programs. There should also be an assessment of an individual's association with groups that advocate for the violent overthrow of the United States.

During medical training and while in medical service, if an individual states an unwillingness to serve as a military physician in combat overseas, he should be removed from the program.

In addition, the Department of Defense needs to develop a "gateway" where troubled or substandard military doctors, in exceptional circumstances, can leave or be removed from service. Such an action should be based on a board findings approved by the Service Surgeon General.

The disaffected physician, who owes 10 years of service in exchange for military medical training, might be given an opportunity to transfer to the Indian Health Service or the Public Health Service with an obligation of 13 years. An alternative might be to require full reimbursement for all educational costs and salaries incurred during the officer's training. One would anticipate that a decision to remove an officer from the service would be a serious personnel action, implemented on a very limited basis.

Finally, it takes a long time and considerable financial investment by the government to produce a qualified military physician. Every effort should be made to support the mission of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Maryland. The USU has a worldwide reputation and its excellence in training for military health professionals should not be tainted by this brutal incident.

NAUS encourages your caution knowing that it would be very counterproductive if the shooting at Fort Hood and other responses to this tragedy should distract doctors from pursuing careers in military medicine, particularly given our current international situation and the clear need for competent, qualified and talented military personnel in the Medical Corps and elsewhere.

Again, our NAUS membership is deeply and seriously concerned about the emergence of this type of terrorism and the missed signals that allowed Major Hasan to carry out his deadly plan. We request that every effort possible be made to rectify, as best we can, the procedures and policies that led to this debacle in order to protect our country, our servicemembers and our citizens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W Matz', with a stylized flourish at the end.

WILLIAM M. MATZ, Jr.
Major General, US Army, Retired
President