

Coast Guard Convictions Highlight Aggressive Crackdown on Hazing

By Greg T. Rinckey

The courts-martial of seven Coast Guardsmen convicted of hazing other sailors are highlighting how the armed forces are demonstrating little restraint in their effort to aggressively enforce a zero-tolerance policy against the brutal and demeaning practice.

The U.S. Coast Guard on June 24 announced

its completion of a series of court-martial and administrative punishments resulting from a two-year investigation into hazing allegations on the *Venturous*

, a St. Petersburg, Fla.-based cutter. In all, seven sailors were convicted at court-martial, and administrative actions were taken against an unspecified number of others for their involvement in the clandestine hazing that occurred in the ship's berth area between summer 2007 and winter 2009.

Two of those sailors are being separated from the Coast Guard, and of them one must register as a sex offender because of an abusive sexual contact charge. A Coast Guard lieutenant commander told

Navy Times

that members of the *Venturous*

were "tied down, stripped, coated in foreign substances and called derogatory names," and "inappropriate sexual contact" was involved.

The armed forces have been aggressively cracking down on hazing ever since videos showing Marines pushing golden jump wings into the chests of new paratroopers became a national spectacle in 1997. In many cases, accused hazing offenders are primarily prosecuted under Article 93 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice for cruelty or maltreatment or Article 92 for failure to obey an order or regulation or dereliction in the performance of duties.

The *Venturous*

case, however, shows that the military has many more options in its fight against hazing. For example, on top of being found guilty of a maltreatment charge, Chief Kiel M. Johanson was also convicted of abusive sexual contact, indecent exposure and assault consummated by a battery, according to a Coast Guard press release. He must register as a sex offender where he lives, works and attends school and is undergoing separation from the Coast Guard. Seaman Apprentice Eric A. Michaels was found guilty of dereliction of duty, false official statements, assault, and disorderly conduct. He was sentenced to a bad conduct discharge five months of confinement.

It is not uncommon for service members to confuse unsanctioned hazing ceremonies with the

legitimate bond-strengthening and honor-bestowing traditions. Service members accused of hazing should contact a military law attorney.

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