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Tully Rinckey PLLC's Greg T. Rinckey, Esq. Tells Air Force Times a 44 ½ Year Sentence for an Air Force Staff Sgt. is Unlikely

Attorney: 44½ years unlikely for MTI who abused trainees

A sentencing hearing for a former military training instructor who admitted to mistreating recruits and telling them to lie about it continued Wednesday afternoon at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland. A military judge a day earlier accepted guilty pleas from Staff Sgt. Annamarie Ellis on charges she maltreated and maltrained basic trainees and obstructed justice multiple times while assigned to the 323rd Training Squadron in 2009 and 2010, 1st Lt. Samantha Degnan, a Lackland spokeswoman. Ellis chose to have her case decided by a judge rather than a jury. The offenses, which include three charges and 24 specifications, carry a maximum penalty of 44½ years in prison. Such a lengthy sentence, however, is highly unlikely, said Greg Rinckey, a former Army judge advocate now in private practice. "She's not going to get anywhere close to 44 years," Rinckey said. Ellis could, however, realistically face as many as six years. In an arguably more serious case of MTI misconduct, former Tech. Sgt. Bobby Bass was sentenced last April to just six months behind bars and reduction to E-5 after he was convicted of 31 counts of cruelty, assault, dereliction of duty, failure to obey a lawful command and wrongful sexual contact. Bass physically abused trainees and ordered them to strip naked and enter a shower and to apply Icy Hot to their genitals as punishment. Ellis, who is now assigned to 559th Aerospace Medicine Squadron, is not accused of any sexual offenses or of physically abusing recruits. In court Tuesday, she admitted to ordering recruits to work out naked in a shower at night and telling one trainee to bark like a dog, the San Antonio Express-News reported. She

said her threats — which included beating them and sending them home in body bags — were her way of establishing authority. She also instigated a fight between two male trainees that left one with a black eye and told them to lie about it, the newspaper reported. Charges against a female training instructor are rare, Rinckey said. “That’s what makes this case, so interesting to the military and the public at large,” he said. “It goes to show it can both ways.” The sentencing phase of Ellis’ court-martial is expected to continue Thursday.