

Love in the Military Could Cause Concern on Valentine's Day

Dating, Cheating and Displays of Affection Can Lead to Serious Trouble.

Valentine's Day evokes the feelings of love and passion, but in the military it can attract a long list of criminal offenses. The military's Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) has specific rules against dating, cheating and even public displays of affection, and service members run the risk of breaking many of them on the holiday. Whether your lover is a superior, a subordinate or of equal rank, all service members are encouraged to familiarize themselves with their branch's stance on dating and fraternization in the service. Army Regulation 600-20, OPNAVINST 5370.2c, U.S. Navy Regulation 1165, Marine Corps Manual 1100.4, and Air Force Instruction 36-2909 all identify the specific rules and regulations surrounding fraternization in each particular branch of the military. In cases of inappropriate superior-subordinate relationships, service members can face UCMJ charges of fraternization, conduct unbecoming of an officer or failure to obey a lawful order or regulation. Service members who are married and are found to be cheating on their spouses can face multiple charges, as well. Married service members sleeping with someone other than their spouse could face charges of adultery. Bear in mind also that the military does not view legal separation as a defense, and in addition deems two people living together "as husband and wife," without benefit of marriage, as wrongful cohabitation, another UCMJ violation. Another serious charge to consider around Valentine's Day is indecent acts with one another. Sexual activities performed in the open or in the presence of others that are viewed as crude, obscene and tasteless by normal standards risk being labeled as unlawful and indecent. "Word to the wise, keep your amorous pursuits behind closed doors and avoid public displays of affection, particularly when in uniform where your conduct could potentially bring discredit on the service," said Lisa M. Windsor, a former Army JAG attorney who practices military law at Tully Rinckey PLLC. "Service members swooning this Valentine's Day need to remember that a romantic relationship in the military can leave them with something much worse than heartbreak. Sadly, love is not an affirmative defense at a court martial."