Sample/Chapter 13

(A Hoax at the VA)

The 55th Wing and a Prayer

A Whistleblower's Story

This Manuscript is a protected disclosure as defined by 5 U.S.C. § 2302

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About the Cover:

During the month of June 2018, the *Omaha World-Herald* published a three-day investigative series exposing aircraft maintenance deficiencies of the 55th Wing, located at Offutt AFB in the State of Nebraska. Illustrations accompanying the series were drawn by editorial cartoonist Jeffery Koterba.

On 18 July 2018, the Secretary of the Air Force responded to an inquiry from Nebraska legislators, dismissing the data compiled by investigative reporter Steve Liewer. Subsequently, on 19 July 2018, the Omaha World-Herald published an editorial cartoon drawn by Jeff Koterba, presenting a hyperbolic view of the C-135 variants maintained by the 55th Wing.

Jeffrey Koterba is an American editorial cartoonist based in Omaha, Nebraska. He was an editorial cartoonist for the Omaha World-Herald from 1989 to September 2020. His work is syndicated nationwide to over 850 newspapers by Cagle Cartoons. Wikipedia

Also see Lawmakers Call for Safety Checks After C-135 Failures at Offutt

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(Last Entry, July 2023)

George G. Sarris

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Note: A Freestyle of editing has been applied to this manuscript. For the benefit of the reader, editorial discretion of citations and official reports may have been applied without altering the intended meaning of the original sources.

Foreword

The hunt for Osama bin Laden was well underway when I blew-the-whistle on the 55th Wing for operating a fleet of reconnaissance aircraft that were not airworthy. The RC-135 fleet was plagued with in-flight emergencies, ground aborts, air aborts, and ineffective missions due to substandard maintenance practices.

The impact that my disclosures had on the Global War on Terrorism may never be known, but it was clear that I had embarrassed the Agency. Military managers and defense department officials employed the use of harassment, intimidation, and reprisals to keep me in check. Ultimately, my disclosures were validated.

You are about to read a series of events that demonstrate the degrading evolution of an excellent and highly experienced military aircraft mechanic of thirty years, to the point of being just as negligent as the managers masquerading as leaders.

These events take place at Offutt AFB, Nebraska, home to the USAF's 55th Wing. The aircraft involved are managed by programs with code names such as Big Safari, Combat Sent, Constant Phoenix, and Open Skies. These are highly specialized intelligence-gathering aircraft vital to the security of the United States and its allies.

Table of Contents

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Chapter 13

A Hoax at the VA

After three years, the United States Office of Special Counsel notified me that it had terminated its inquiry into my allegations. However, because I alleged that I was the victim of a prohibited personnel practice as defined by 5 U.S.C. § 2302(b)(8) — commonly known as a "reprisal for whistleblowing" — I had the right to seek corrective action from the MSPB under the provisions of 5 U.S.C. § 1214(a)(3) and §1221. Having exhausted all available avenues for redress through the OSC, I now had the right to file an Individual Right of Action (IRA) with the Merit System Protection Board. By law, I had to petition the MSPB within sixty-five days.

Sometimes, unrelated legal events occur and impact the outcome of other legal events. In December 2010, the MSPB reversed a landmark National Security Ruling of *Conyers v. Department of Defense*.[66] The MSPB reversal of *Conyers v. Department of Defense* placed my case under the jurisdiction of the Merit System Protection Board, regardless of the security clearance matter associated with my case.

My service agreement with the Government Accountability Project (GAP) was for representation before the OSC and for representation of the "security clearance matters." Nearly sixty-five days had passed with no word from my counsel. I felt abandoned and began to update my resume in preparation for the termination of my employment. In December 2010, with just one week remaining on the MSPB sixty-five-day rule, GAP notified me of its decision to also represent me before the MSPB. This news set off a fervor of activity.

The MSPB had recently incorporated a new filing system that permitted electronic filings via the "e-Appeal website." Neither I nor my counsel were familiar with this new system. As with any government e-mail system, there are compatibility quirks, security settings, and password flukes to overcome. On Friday, 17 December 2010, an electronic e-Appeal in the matter of *Mr. George G. Sarris v. Department of the Air Force,* was submitted to the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Boards' Denver Field Office. Counsel notified me that I should hear something from the MSPB within the next ten days.

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[66] *Conyers v. Dept. of Defense*; MSPB Docket No. CH-0752-09-0925-I-1.

I received an e-Appeal notification from the MSPB on 23 December 2010, identified as an Acknowledgement Order.[67] On this same day, I received an e-mail from my GAP-appointed attorney informing me that he was taking a vacation outside the country and would not be available for a few weeks. He also said that I could expect some routine legal notices from the MSPB.

Nearly two weeks had passed when I began to wonder about the wording in the Acknowledgement Order from the MSPB of 23 December. After reviewing the Acknowledgement Order more carefully, I discovered that I had only ten days to file initial disclosures with the MSPB. It appeared as though I may have missed a deadline.

With one simple e-mail to Tom Devine, legal director at GAP, a new urgency overcame the case. Indeed, I had missed the deadline to file initial disclosures with the MSPB. Tom Devine took charge to determine if anyone at GAP had received the Acknowledgement Order. Since my counsel was out of the country and no one else had the password to access my e-Appeal account, it was determined that counsel had not properly received notice of the ten-day requirement. Multiple e-Appeals were filed over the next couple of days, culminating in an MSPB order granting an extension of time to file initial disclosures.

Once the case was back on track, the MSPB judge ordered a one-month stay on discovery, and also appointed a second MSPB judge to oversee settlement negotiations. In exchange for withdrawing my complaint with the MSPB, the Agency offered me a GS-5 position as a motor vehicle operator. A motor vehicle operator did not require a security clearance, but it equated to a cut in pay of about ten thousand dollars annually. I strongly rejected the offer.

Agency counsel insisted that my security clearance was about to be adjudicated and that it was in my best interest to settle before I was outright fired due to the loss of my security clearance. The MSPB judge introduced the possibility of a Discontinued Service Retirement (DSR). More negotiations were ordered by the judge, extending the original one-month stay into three months.

Meanwhile, and at the insistence of my wife, I made an inquiry at the local VA hospital. Thanks to an information request filed by AFGE Local 1486 in October 2010, I discovered that Ms. Dawn A. Tanner had performed an unauthorized and improper mental assessment of me without my knowledge. I discovered that Ms. Dawn A. Tanner had been given unauthorized access to the Commander Directed Investigation ordered by Col. Parsons. I also discovered that Ms. Dawn A. Tanner and Maj. Dana C. McCown were housemates.

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[67] *Sarris v. Dept. of Air Force*; MSPB No. DE-1221-11-0132-W-1.

Through the website LinkedIn, I discovered that Tanner was performing an internship as a drug abuse counselor at the VA Hospital in Omaha, Nebraska. Since I am a veteran, I had reason to suspect that Ms. Tanner may have accessed my medical records at the VA.

My personal appearance at the VA Hospital on the afternoon of Thursday, 3 March 2011, had a significant effect on the case. I received the subsequent message from my counsel the following Monday, 7 March 2011:

> George, Capt. Coggin the AF counsel just called to say that all settlement negotiations are now suspended and the previous offer is withdrawn. The AF is going to notify the MSPB that the reason for this is the allegation that you went to the place of employment of the roommate of Lt. Col. McCown. Although the protection order McCown got against you does not cover actions toward her roommate, the police were called on her allegation that you were emotionally distraught and intimidating. Capt. Coggin said he did not yet know how the matter is going to be handled, and that the AF has decided to cease settlement negotiations with you. I can only assume that this information is going to be considered as additional evidence in the security clearance review case.

At first, I thought I was doomed! Vicki felt sick about the matter because it was at her insistence that I inquired with the VA. Upon my counsel's request, I provided a detailed synopsis of the events from which a legal argument was presented to agency counsel, Capt. Coggin:

> You informed me by phone on March 7, 2011, that the Air Force settlement authority was suspending settlement negotiations pending inquiry into an alleged incident of Mr. Sarris at the Omaha VA last week. I think that would be a mistake, and want to try to keep the settlement on track in the interests of both parties. Therefore, I submit the following for your consideration.
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> 1. Mr. Sarris had learned that Dawn Tanner, who resides with Lt. Col. McCown, may be working for the VA in Omaha, Ne. Knowing that she made a mental assessment of him and gave it to McCown for inclusion in his official personnel folder, and/or for state court

proceedings, Mr. Sarris was concerned that she may have also accessed his VA records without his permission. Had Mr. Sarris discovered that his records had been accessed, Mr. Sarris intended to file a privacy right complaint with the VA and HIPAA. This would of course be his right.

2. On 7 Feb. 2011, Mr. Sarris filed a complaint with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services regarding Ms. Tanner purporting to have conducted a mental assessment of him, and having provided the assessment to his employer by way of Lt. Col. Dana C. McCown. Public records did not show that Ms. Tanner was a licensed therapist or mental health professional. In Mr. Sarris' SIF, obtained for him by the union, Lt. Col. McCown charged that Mr. Sarris was cited for disturbing the peace in August 2010, during his lawful picketing of her home as a government official involved in the cover-up of aircraft safety issues, a matter covered in the local press and one that is of public interest. Mr. Sarris was never arrested or charged with disturbing the peace, despite her having summoned the police. Instead, she merely obtained a civil protection order against Mr. Sarris, a matter that is now on appeal. Mr. Sarris has a right to defend himself from both the security clearance action and civil protection proceedings that Lt. Col. McCown has instituted. His visit to the VA to determine if either of those actions had been based on improper access of his healthcare records or a misrepresented official VA status by an unlicensed professional are well within his rights.

3. Additionally, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services licensure division indicates that Ms. Tanner was not licensed when she made the unauthorized and improper assessment of him, which she then gave to McCown to use as an official document. This assessment was later used against him by McCown in an attempt to ban him from the base and to suspend him for three days without pay.

4. An acquaintance of Mr. Sarris' wife recommend that Mr. Sarris inquire at the VA Patients Advocate Office. So, on Friday afternoon, 4 March, [Thursday afternoon 3 March] Mr. Sarris went to

the VA to inquire. Mr. Sarris arrived at the VA during the lunch hour. After inquiring at the reception desk for Patients Advocate office, not for Ms. Tanner, Mr. Sarris was directed to that office on the first floor. When the patient advocate, Lori [Jodie Wilson] returned from her lunch, Mr. Sarris and she had a business-like discussion about his concern as to whether Ms. Tanner spoke for herself or for the VA in her court report, and whether there was any indication that she had unlawfully accessed Mr. Sarris' VA healthcare files in the making of that report. After about fifteen minutes, Mr. Sarris was referred to the human resources office in building 5. Mr. Sarris walked to building 5 and made the same inquiries at that office.

5. The Human Resources Specialist was very methodical in addressing his concerns. She did not state if Dawn Tanner worked for the VA or not. However, assuming that she may have been a VA employee, the discussion analyzed whether or not there may have been an improper nexus between the VA and Ms. Tanner, or whether Ms. Tanner may have been acting on her own when she made statements about him and provided them to McCown for use in court. Mr. Sarris expressed his concern for other veterans' privacy rights. The HR rep. suggested that the nexus was more likely through the commander at Offutt AFB rather than with the VA.

6. After this discussion, Mr. Sarris was referred to the information and records office (IRO) back in the main building. This office had a sign that said, "Went to lunch. Will return at 1:40." Mr. Sarris waited until the IRO office door was opened.

The IRO manager looked up his records, and informed him that no entry indicated that his records had been improperly accessed. Mr. Sarris had no reason to disbelieve her, and accepted the assurance that his medical records had not been breached. Mr. Sarris returned to his car at about 1:50 p.m.

7. Everyone Mr. Sarris spoke with was very polite and he was polite to them. The discussions were private and there were no arguments. Mr. Sarris left without knowing if Dawn Tanner worked at the VA. Mr. Sarris does not even know what she looks like.

> 8. Mr. Sarris is a Veteran. Mr. Sarris has a right to have business at the VA, and has been to this VA facility in the past, including with his father-in-law, who is also a veteran. As to his visit to the VA last week, Mr. Sarris was unaware that the police were notified.

Something within McCown's story threw red flags to agency counsel. As a result, her fabricated and embellished stories began to unfold. Cranky Pants asserted that my presence at the VA Hospital somehow violated the harassment protection order.

After this hoax, the Agency miraculously changed its attitude and placed possibilities on the table that were previously not considered, such as early retirement options and equivalent job placement. By the end of March 2011, McCown had retained a personal attorney to represent herself in my appeal to the harassment protection order. In other words, the Air Force JAG was no longer providing Maj. McCown with legal advice on a civil matter before the Nebraska Court of Appeals.

Air Force Counsel was now aware that I had obtained a copy of the security information file established against me by Cranky Pants. However, Agency Counsel was not authorized access to this information. In accordance with DOD Directive 5200.2-R, only AFCAF, and the subject, *me,* have access to this information.

I displayed a glimpse of my hand to Agency Counsel by furnishing them with some of the contents of my SIF. Specifically, an addendum to the SIF in which McCown reported I was cited by the Sarpy County Sheriff's Department for disturbing the peace on the day that I lawfully protested in front of her home — a citation McCown also claimed is cause to ban me from my work center on base, and proves that she deserved a protection order against me. Factually, NO SUCH CITATION EXISTED. Therefore, McCown lied in the SIF, she lied to Offutt AFB officials, and she lied to a Federal investigation.

The Marriage

Lt. Col. McCown and her partner, Ms. Dawn A. Tanner, had a deep dark secret that would have ended their careers if I had chosen to expose it. They were, in fact, gay. In 2010 when I protested at Lt. Col. McCown's residence, the U.S. military was still operating under the "don't ask don't tell" policy. The policy prohibited people who demonstrate a propensity or intent to engage in homosexual acts from serving in the armed forces of the United States, because their presence would create an unacceptable risk to the high standards of morale, good order and discipline, and

unit cohesion that are the essence of military capability.[68] McCown and Tanner were in love with each other and had been residing as a couple for a number of years.

By the year 2013, Lt. Col. McCown had retired, while her partner, Ms. Dawn A. Tanner, received a commission as a Captain in the USAF. After the "don't ask don't tell" policy was repealed, McCown and Tanner were joined in marriage. A military publication called *Inside Osan Airbase,* featured McCown and Tanner in an article about same-sex couples awaiting theater-specific benefits. A caption under their wedding picture read, "Tanner and McCown both made sacrifices during their careers in order to stay together and are excited for the next generation of service members who won't have to make the same hard choices." What McCown and Tanner refer to as sacrifices, were unlawful covert acts to protect their relationship. McCown and Tanner didn't fear me, they feared being separated if their relationship were exposed.

As previously stated, it is my belief that Ms. Dawn A. Tanner posed as a mental health expert and forged a mental health assessment, painting me as a 'madman', then gave the forgery to Dana C. McCown for inclusion in my SIF. It is also my belief that this forgery was unlawfully withheld from me to protect McCown and Tanner from a civil lawsuit.

My presence at the VA exposed the contempt McCown has toward me and her willingness to break the law to punish me. Finally, after all of this time, McCown's lies were visible. The Air Force didn't want to risk tarnishing its image before the MSPB, therefore, the Agency placed a substantially more reasonable settlement offer on the table.

Initially, the OSC didn't take any action on my case. Only after *The Kansas City Star* reported my predicament in December 2008, did the OSC get serious about investigating my September 2007, complaint of Prohibited Personnel Practices. Amusingly, the OSC and the DOD began to compete against each other for jurisdiction. The problem with this is that the DOD and the OSC were operating under different statutes and couldn't share information.

A year prior to the VA Hoax, I was becoming aggravated with some of the settlement terms offered by the agency. A settlement offer of April 2010, through the United States Office of Special Counsel, consisted of nothing more than the administrative actions that would have taken place with the passage of time, such as letters of reprimands being removed from my file after two years. There was no discussion of job placement, reinstatement, or security clearance matters. Counsel was advising me to accept any offer. The only issue not agreed upon at the time was attorney fees to be paid by the agency.

[68] Don't ask don't tell: Pub.L. 103–160 (10 U.S.C. § 654) November 30, 1993; Repealed September 20, 2010.

The OSC case dragged on for months. The OSC was tired of being ignored by my counsel, and I was tired of the OSC ignoring me. I was also getting frustrated over not being provided with the written terms of a settlement offer. We were at a stalemate.

In the meantime, I had obtained copies of the SIF as well as redacted copies of known DOD investigations related to my protected disclosure to Senator Grassley. Repeated requests to Senator Grassley and his staff for non-redacted investigative materials were unsuccessful. Quite frankly, I began to compare Senator Charles Grassley — the champion of whistleblower legislation — to a wolf in sheep's clothing.

The best source of information was obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). A combination of the SIF, FOIA, Sarpy County Court records, and documents submitted by Cranky Pants to support the three-day suspension, revealed a trail of corruption from Offutt AFB, through the Pentagon, and onto Capitol Hill.

But now, the stakes were different. The hoax at the VA set into action a means by which the Air Force could blame everything on Cranky Pants. Agency counsel realized that McCown had lied about me being cited for disturbing the peace, and now had cause to discredit the rest of her stories. The Agency feared that other, more condemning facts may surface in an MSPB hearing — facts that would discredit generals, legislators, the DOD, even the office of the Secretary of Defense. It was better to offer a more substantial settlement than to risk a public release of nationally embarrassing information.

Offers that were previously impossible were suddenly viable, such as a permanent detail to the base gym at an aircraft mechanic's pay and continued employment until I retire in the year 2014, despite the possible revocation of my security clearance.

There was one clause in the settlement offer that was a deal-breaker — the requirement that I waive "The United States Constitution, or any other state, local, or federal law." I would never waive my rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution. I honorably served my country for twenty-eight years and took an oath to protect the rights provided by the United States Constitution.

I am shocked that any settlement would require any individual to waive his rights — especially those rights protected by the United States Constitution. I condemn the Agency for attempting to make this a part of the settlement, and therefore, question the loyalty of Agency counsel, Capt. Coggin, to uphold his oath to defend the Constitution of the United States of America.

In March 2011, my lead counsel (Mr. Thad Guyer) came up with wording for inclusion in the settlement. The Agency accepted the following clause:

> This agreement does not preclude the Appellant from pursuing the alleged violation of his rights through any of the following legal claims or remedies (or preclude any Agency employee from pursuing the same in their private and unofficial capacity): (1) a state court challenge to the validity of any state court order obtained against him by any individual in their private and unofficial capacity; (2) a civil action against any individual for defamation, invasion of privacy, abuse of process, malicious prosecution or other legal claims based upon the private and unofficial conduct of said individual to allegedly violate Appellant's non-employment rights; (3) applying for or making claims for any compensation available to the Appellant from any federal agency other than the Department of the Air Force, and for which the Agency would not be a named or necessary party in the making of said claim or application; (4) any new claims that arise after the signing of this agreement, aside from those future actions the Appellant has specifically agreed to by signing this agreement. Additionally, although the Appellant does release the Agency from all liability for acts preceding the date of this Agreement, Appellant does not waive or forego herein the exercise of any of his Constitutional rights, including his freedom of speech and right of association.

The new offer guaranteed that I would maintain my present job until retirement. It allows me to seek other jobs with the Air Force or Federal service — and, it allows me to sue McCown or anyone else I discover who violated my civil rights or who may have invaded my right to privacy. McCown, Tanner, and other military officers and civilian managers, are on my list for civil court actions. This new offer also removed all prior language that I have no contact at all, either in person or through a third party, with Lt. Col. Dana McCown or any other person who made a report regarding the picketing incident at Lt. Col. McCown's home.

In April 2011, three weeks after settling out of court, Lt. Col. Dana C. McCown was unexpectedly stripped of her command and reassigned to Eglin AFB, Florida.

The settlement failed to address some outstanding issues. For example, who would write my annual appraisal? What would become of the one-year banishment from my old work center? Will I regain access to the unclassified government computer network? Perhaps the most interesting outstanding issue is that of my security clearance. Will it be adjudicated, or will it remain suspended until my retirement in 2014?

Addendum to my SIF

On Monday, 11 July 2011, I was provided with the official Statement of Reasons (SOR) from AFCAF. Yes, my security clearance will be adjudicated. Many of the previous issues of concern had evaporated, especially McCown's claim of me being mentally unstable.

The official SOR reduced McCown's SIF from twenty-five pages of gibberish to only one and a half pages. Half a page was devoted to the VA hoax. Apparently, McCown and Tanner had teamed up to further defame me by falsely claiming that Dawn A. Tanner had an Order of Protection against me. The SOR read:

> d. The AFCAF was forwarded an e-mail from your commander through 55 Wing/Information Protection. The e-mail disclosed that on 03/03/2011, you went to the Omaha VA Patients Advocate Office looking for your commander's roommate. When the roommate became aware of this incident, she went to the VA police. They started a report and an investigation. The VA police confirmed you were not a patient or a client at Omaha VA. The roommate requested and received police escorts to her car.
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> e. A Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) police report dated 03/04/2011, disclosed that you went to the VA Medical Center in Omaha, Nebraska. You went to the Patients Advocate Office and told the office personnel that you were a retired military person working at Offutt AFB. You stated that you had done some protesting on a piece of private property and realized that it was the wrong location. You stated that you were in the process of losing your job and you were trying to find the person who wrote a mental health assessment about you. You stated that the person had no business doing a mental health statement. You stated that the person who wrote the statement used to work at the Lincoln VA, but now worked at the Omaha VA. As you

> flipped through the binder you were carrying, you had papers with a house address on it that you showed to the office personnel. You also showed the office personnel a copy of the roommate's social worker certificate and asked if she worked there. When the office personnel could not locate the person you were looking for, you insisted that she worked there as a counselor and that she was in your records doing a mental health assessment that she had no business doing. Upon becoming aware of this information, the person you were looking for reported the incident to the VA police stating you had violated an Order of Protection issued against you in Sarpy County. She stated that she had contacted the Sarpy County Sheriff's Office and notified them of the incident. They notified her that they would be following up with the Douglas County Sheriff's Office because the incident occurred in Douglas County.

Neither the Sarpy County Sheriff's Office, the Douglas County Sheriff's Office, nor the Veteran Administration Police contacted me regarding this report — most likely because an Order of Protection for Dawn Tanner never existed. VA Incident Report #2011030415253376 was closed without action.

In March of 2013, I received a Vaughn Index for FOIA Request 2011-06327-F. The Vaughn Index disclosed 6 separate e-mails concerning the hoax at the VA. In March 2011, Tanner and the Air Force JAG office tried to gain access to the VA Incident Report. The VA police appropriately informed both parties that they would have to file a VA Form 3288, REQUEST FOR AND CONSENT TO RELEASE OF INFORMATION FROM INDIVIDUAL'S RECORDS. **I never consented to a release!**

According to the Vaughn Index, Lt. Russ Zeeb of the Sarpy County Sheriff's Office, gained access to the VA incident report directly from Tanner@va.gov on 9 March 2011. The next day, 10 March 2011, Lt. Russ Zeeb sent it to the Offutt AFB JAG Office. On 6 May 2011, Cory Zimmer of the 55th Security Forces sent it to the 55th Wing IP Office. Wing IP sent it to AFCAF for inclusion in my SIF. The VA cannot explain to me how Ms. Dawn A. Tanner got her hands on a copy of the VA Incident Report.

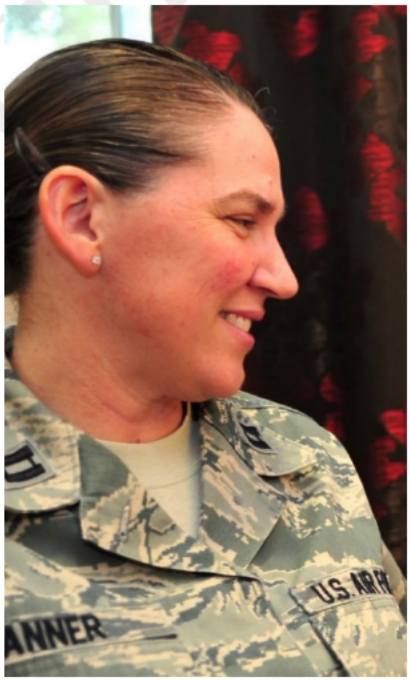
After making this discovery, I provided Sarpy County Officials with a redacted copy of the e-mail from Lt. Russ Zeeb to AF JAG. I also requested, "…all e-mail and other documents

involving Sarpy County over this matter." Sarpy County officials ignored my requests for records.

Ms. Tanner's improper covert mental assessment of me, as well as her false report to the VA police, were used by Maj. Dana C. McCown to revoke my security clearance. In addition to disrupting a 2008 Congressional investigation, I could easily argue that Ms. Dawn A. Tanner made libelous derogatory statements regarding my character in an attempt to protect the career of her partner, Maj. Dana C. McCown.

According to the social website LinkedIn, Dawn A. Tanner became a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and received a commission in the U.S. Air Force. Tanner fast-tracked her way through the ranks, and in July 2023, Lt. Col. Dawn A. Tanner became the Wing Staff Commander, 59th Medical Wing, Lackland AFB, Texas. Internet searches indicate that McCown and Tanner have traveled in tandem since 2003 and sometimes use the last name "McTanner" for social media posts.

2009 photograph of Lt. Col. Dana C. McCown, 55th Maintenance Squadron Commander, Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska. (*Image is public domain/USAF*)



2013 Photograph of Capt. Dawn A. Tanner. (*Image is public domain/USAF*)

Photograph by Todd Feeback (*Kansas City Star*)

About the Author

George Sarris enlisted in the United States Air Force in the spring of 1977 as a tactical fighter aircraft mechanic. In 1985, he was awarded a Bachelor of Science degree from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University with a major in Professional Aeronautics. Following completion of the required curriculum, the FAA granted Mr. Sarris an airframe and powerplant license.

In 1986, Mr. Sarris gained employment as a dual-status technician for the Air National Guard. Over the next sixteen years, he maintained the pneudraulic systems of the RF4-C and the KC-135 aircraft. He volunteered for no-notice deployments, taking part in the Kosovo Campaign as well as Operation Enduring Freedom.

Mr. Sarris transferred to the Federal Civil Service in 2002, where he became the senior mechanic maintaining variants of the RC-135 aircraft at Offutt AFB, Nebraska. During this same period, he transitioned to a traditional status in the Air National Guard and provided training to mechanics converting to the KC-135 airframe. Mr. Sarris retired from the Air National Guard in 2005 after serving for twenty-eight years. He continued to work as a civilian mechanic for the Air Force on the RC-135 aircraft maintenance program until he blew the whistle on the 55th Wing for utilizing aircraft that were not airworthy.

In 2012, Mr. Sarris became the vice president of AFGE Local 1486, representing the Wage Grade employees of Offutt AFB, including the civilian mechanics of the aircraft maintenance squadron. Mr. Sarris retired from the Federal Civil Service in 2014.

Synopsis

I revealed to Congress in 2008 that the United States Air Force was operating a fleet of reconnaissance aircraft (RC-135s) that were not airworthy. To divert attention away from the maintenance issues that I had reported, the agency retaliated with an immediate attack on my character. The diversion included a trip through the Pentagon, Congress, and the Nebraska State Court system. Eventually, government investigations substantiated the non-airworthy conditions that I had reported, but not before the United States had secured a 1.3 billion-dollar foreign military sale to the United Kingdom for the same type of aircraft.

The agency suspended my security clearance and refused to provide me with the derogatory information it had compiled against me. After 17 months, I conducted a one-man, lawful and peaceful protest at the off-base residence of Lt. Col. Dana C. McCown, the Aircraft Maintenance Squadron Commander of the 55th Wing. My protest broke the stalemate when McCown petitioned the Sarpy County District Court for a harassment protection order against me. Through civil court actions, I was able to prove that McCown and her partner (Ms. Dawn A. Tanner) lied to local law enforcement officials and federal investigators, which paved my way to a global settlement in April 2011. (Click here for May 2011 press release)

My security clearance was adjudicated in April 2012. Although a federal administrative law judge recommended the reinstatement of my security clearance, the Personnel Security Appeals Board (PSAB) chose to disregard his recommendation.

Through these events, I stumbled upon a breach of national security involving two major commands spanning several decades. When I reported this security breach to senior defense officials, a "be on the lookout" (BOLO) was issued against me by the 55th Wing security forces. The BOLO violated the terms of the settlement and challenged my authority to act as a union officer of AFGE Local 1486.

Congress and the U.S. Justice Department clearly demonstrated an unwillingness to protect me from prohibited personnel practices (5 U.S.C. § 2302).

Now that I have retired, I provide this information to demonstrate the manner in which government agencies employ the use of harassment, intimidation, and reprisals to control the federal workforce when managers fear that they have been caught doing something unethical or illegal.