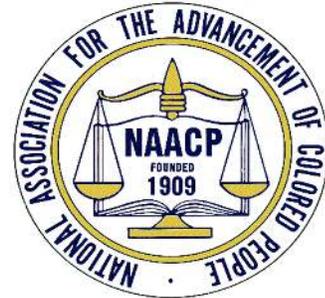


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Editor: Everett A. Lewis, Captain, U. S. Air Force (retired)
Virginia State Conference (VSC) NAACP
Chair, Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee
NAACP Alexandria VA Chair, Armed Services and
Veterans
Affairs Committee
703-360-0261 (h) 571-482-0870 (c)
everettlewis1@cox.net



Black woman to lead Naval Academy's brigade for first time



ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP) — The U.S. Naval Academy has announced that a Black female midshipman will be the brigade commander for the first time.

The academy's commandant said on November 9 that Midshipman 1st Class Sydney Barber will be the commander for the spring semester. Brigade commander is the highest leadership position within the academy's student body.

The brigade commander heads the Academy's day-to-day activities and trains the class of approximately 4,500 midshipmen. Barber becomes the 16th woman to serve in that role.

She is the co-president of the Navy Fellowship of Christian Athletes Club; secretary for the National Society of Black Engineers; and a USNA Gospel Choir and Midshipman Black Studies Club member.

Barber served as the 13th company's executive officer and currently serves as the Brigade's 1st regiment executive officer. Barber is a mechanical engineering major from Lake Forest, Illinois.

Barber is recently credited with mobilizing a team of more than 180 midshipmen, faculty, and alumni to develop the Midshipman Diversity Team to promote greater diversity, inclusivity, and equity within the Brigade.

Barber will be the 16th woman selected for brigade commander in the 44 years women have been attending the academy. The first female brigade commander was then-Midshipman Juliane Gallina, who served in the position in 1991.

<http://baltimoretimes-online.com/news/2020/nov/20/african-american-woman-midshipman-1st-class-sydney/>

Air Force Aid Society announces a new CEO



Retired Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF) Kaleth O. Wright assumed the role of Air Force Aid Society CEO on October 1, 2020.

Wright is the 18th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force. This is the highest noncommissioned officer

position. He has held this role since February 17, 2017, and is responsible for more than 410,000 enlisted Air Force members. He also serves as the advisor to the Chief of Staff and Secretary of the Air Force on issues related to welfare, readiness, morale, and proper utilization of the enlisted force.

Before he was appointed CMSAF, Wright served as the Command Chief Master Sergeant of the U.S. Air Forces in Europe and U.S. Air Forces in Africa and was stationed at Ramstein Air Base in Germany. Wright enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1989. Since this time, he has deployed in support of operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Enduring Freedom, and completed overseas tours in South Korea, Japan, Germany, and Alaska.

The Air Force Aid Society is a 4-star Charity Navigator rated private, nonprofit organization. Founded in 1942, the Air Force Aid Society's mission is to help relieve the financial distress of Air Force members and their families and assist them in achieving their educational goals, as well as improving their quality of life by providing proactive programs. Since 2008, the Society has provided more than \$215 million in direct support to Air Force families. Headquartered in Arlington, Va., the Air Force Aid Society administers assistance through Airman and Family Readiness Centers around the world and maintains cross-servicing agreements with the Army Emergency Relief, the Navy-Marine Corps Relief, the Coast Guard Mutual Assistance and the American Red Cross to offer emergency assistance 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

To learn more about the Air Force Aid Society, please visit www.afas.org or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#).

Senators introduce legislation to reduce disability claims backlog for vets

U.S. senators, Mark R. Warner (D-VA), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) have introduced legislation to increase cooperation between the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and veterans legal clinics, such as the Lewis B. Puller, Jr. Veterans Benefits Clinic housed at the College of William and Mary, or the Mason Veterans and Servicemembers Legal Clinic (M-VETS) at George Mason University. The Veterans Legal

Support Act of 2020 would allow the VA to provide funding to law school legal clinics that provide pro bono legal services to veterans.

Some law schools and their student volunteers are making significant progress in reducing disability claims backlogs and veterans homelessness in communities across the country.

Under attorney supervision, students provide a range of pro bono legal services, including assistance with disability claims, foreclosures, bankruptcies, divorce, child custody and some minor criminal cases. By assisting veterans with complicated benefits claims, legal clinics are turning the VA's most time consuming cases into organized applications that are significantly easier to process. In addition, preventative services like expedited claims assistance and legal counsel offer veterans an opportunity to address challenges before they worsen, often resulting in significant long-term savings to the government.

“Since its establishment in 2008, the efforts of William & Mary Veterans Benefits Clinic students and staff have resulted in the awarding of over \$53 million in projected lifetime benefits to veterans.

Established in 2004 as the first clinic of its kind at any law school in the United States of America, M-VETS provides free legal assistance to the veteran and military community in a variety of matters, including Virginia civil litigation matters, family law, consumer protection issues, wills and powers of attorney, as well as assisting with matters before the Department of Veterans Affairs (“DVA”) and various administrative boards, including discharge upgrades, record corrections, military pay and entitlement matters, and DVA disability benefit appeals.

Lewis B. Puller, Jr. Veterans Benefits Clinic housed at the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA

<https://law.wm.edu/academics/programs/jd/electives/clinics/veterans/index.php>
veterans@wm.edu

The Mason Veterans and Servicemembers Legal Clinic (M-VETS) at George Mason University, Fairfax, VA. <https://mvets.law.gmu.edu/> mvets@gmu.edu

<https://virginialegacy.com/2020/11/28/senators-introduce-legislation-to-reduce-disability-claims-backlog-for-vets/>

Army testing recruits for sickle cell trait

The Army added sickle cell trait (SCT) conditions it tests recruits for in November 2020, following a spate of military deaths that were blamed on the hereditary condition blood condition. There are plans to extend the tests to all soldiers within the year. Blood draws that test for a number of conditions and are done as part of recruits' initial screening exam have included SCT since the beginning of November, Maj. Sean Donohue, a command surgeon with the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, said in the statement.

Having SCT does not disqualify recruits from service, he said. The tests were added to allow the Army to know who has the blood condition so they can be provided the care and support they need, the statement said.

Most people with SCT do not have any symptoms of the more serious sickle cell disease and lead normal lives, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But having the trait can increase the likelihood of muscle breakdown and potentially deadly heat stroke during intense exercise, such as military training, especially in extreme heat or cold, or at altitude, the CDC says.

Discovering early on in a soldier's career that they have the trait could help officials better distinguish "the difference between someone who may look like they have a heat-related injury from someone who has [SCT]," Donohue said.

About 2% of Army recruits have been found to have SCT since the service began testing for the condition in early November, he said. That's roughly the same SCT prevalence as in the general population, according to the CDC.

SCT and full-blown sickle cell disease are far more common among Black people but can affect all races and ethnicities, the CDC says.

Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program and Discharge Upgrade

The Veterans Consortium's Discharge Upgrade Program provides free nationwide legal representation to veterans with Other Than Honorable discharges due to conduct related to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Military Sexual Trauma (MST), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and other mental health conditions. The Veterans Consortium Discharge Upgrade Program provides legal support and representation to veterans in discharge upgrade appeals before their service's Discharge Review Board. www.vetsprobono.org

Retired Gen. Lloyd Austin sworn in as secretary of defense



President Joe Biden's pick for defense secretary 67-year-old retired General Lloyd Austin III was sworn in Jan. 22, 2021. He is the first black leader of the Pentagon.

"Throughout his lifetime of dedicated service — and in the many hours we've spent together in the White House Situation Room and with our troops overseas — General Austin has demonstrated exemplary leadership, character, and command," Biden said in a statement. Austin won out against former favorite Michele Flournoy, who many had expected to become the first woman to serve as US defense secretary.

On Jan. 21, the House and Senate voted to approve a waiver that Austin needed to override a law that mandates ex-military officers spend seven years out of uniform before leading the Pentagon. Austin retired as a four-star general in 2016.

The retired general spent 41 years serving in the military and led US and coalition troops in Iraq during former President Barack Obama's first term — when Joe Biden was vice president.

In 2012 he became the first-ever Black vice chief of staff of the US Army, the second-highest position. He then took command of the US Central Command and was in charge of the US's role in pushing Islamic State militants out of Syria and Iraq.

He was also involved in the initial invasion of Iraq in 2003 serving as assistant commander of the 3rd Infantry Division. He subsequently oversaw the withdrawal of US troops in 2011, a decision which he disagreed with.

<https://www.dw.com/en/joe-biden-picks-loyd-austin-as-defense-secretary/a-55859695>

Biden taps Denis McDonough to lead VA



(CNN) President Joe Biden has nominated Denis McDonough to lead the Department of Veterans Affairs, McDonough, a native of Minnesota who served as chief of staff during Obama's

entire second term, also worked as deputy national security adviser. McDonough worked with lawmakers to craft the VA Choice Act, which Congress later revised with the VA MISSION Act.

Black service members in the Air Force are treated differently than their White peers, an investigation finds

(CNN) Black service members in the US Air Force face disparities in disciplinary action and career opportunities compared to their White peers, according to a recent report.

The findings, released December 21, come from an independent review conducted by the Air Force Inspector General.

Investigators examined whether Black members of the Air Force and Space Force experienced racial disparities when it came to military discipline, professional development, career opportunities, and retention. They also surveyed Black Airmen and Space professionals on their experiences regarding racism, bias and unequal opportunities.

Enlisted Black service members are 72% more likely to face disciplinary action than their White counterparts and 57% more likely to be tried in military court, the report found.

Young Black enlisted members were also found to be twice as likely as their White peers to be involuntarily discharged over misconduct and 1.64 times as likely to be investigated for criminal offenses.

Additionally, Black service members are less likely to be promoted than White officers and less likely to receive career development opportunities, investigators determined.

Black service members represent 19% of all enlisted personnel, but just 9% of officers. For White service members, the trend reverses. Two-thirds of all enlisted service members are White. But among officer ranks, more than three-quarters are.

For example, only about 2 percent of the 15,000 active duty Air Force pilots are Black, and Black service members are underrepresented in the upper enlisted and officer ranks.

Other significant findings include:

- Young Black enlisted airmen and guardians are almost twice as likely as white peers to be involuntarily discharged based on misconduct.
- Black airmen and guardians are twice as likely as white peers to be apprehended by Security Forces.
- Black airmen and guardians are investigated and substantiated for Military Equal Opportunity (MEO) sexual harassment cases at a higher rate than white peers.
- Black officers are underrepresented in Definitely Promote (DP) allocations for the ranks of lieutenant colonel and colonel
- <https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/22/us/black-air-force-members-racism-ig-report-trnd/index.html>

https://taskandpurpose.com/news/air-force-racial-disparity-study-2020/?mc_cid=28ef66e65a&mc_eid=8e2763d2c9&fbclid=IwAR1S-QD2Yf4ZusSHDqDUKsTkC50fTkL47EvgJFyw4laucuuKOhQKBvvM8NU



Editor, NAACP Alexandria VA

