



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on October 18, 2013

Pentagon's True Take on Pro-family, Christian Groups Remains Cloudy

The U.S. Army has appeared to do an about-face on some derogatory information recently released about the Christian conservative American Family Association (AFA). [Fox News](#) reported that in early October dozens of active duty and reserve Army troops were informed during a briefing at Camp Shelby in Mississippi that the respected pro-family organization should be classified as a hate group. According to Fox, during a slide presentation at the briefing the AFA was listed “alongside domestic hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazis, the Black Panthers, and the Nation of Islam.”



But after the story about the misinformation gained traction in the press, the [Pentagon issued a statement](#) claiming that the designation had been based on faulty research. Pentagon spokesman George Wright insisted that the slide in question “was not produced by the Army and it does not reflect our policy or doctrine.” Wright shifted blame for the mis-designation to “a soldier conducting a briefing which included info acquired from an Internet search. Info was not pulled from official Army sources, nor was it approved by senior Army leaders, senior equal opportunity counselors, or judge-advocate personnel.”

The Pentagon spokesman added that after being challenged the soldier responsible for the slide “recognized that the information was incorrect. The briefing has been updated and any reference to American Family Association has been removed.”

A soldier who attended the briefing provided Fox News with a photo, taken from his cell phone, that listed the AFA as a hate group. “Under the AFA headline is a photograph of Westboro Baptist Church preacher Fred Phelps holding a sign reading ‘No special law for f***,’” reported Fox News.

The AFA confirmed that it has never had any connection with Phelps and his radical pseudo-Christian cult, which is notorious for its efforts to disrupt the funerals of fallen American soldiers with signs bearing hateful anti-homosexual rhetoric.

The soldier told Fox that a chaplain attending the briefing challenged the instructor’s hate-group designation of the AFA. “The instructor said AFA could be considered a hate group because they don’t like gays,” the soldier told Fox News. “The slide was talking about how AFA refers to gays as sinners and heathens in derogatory terms” — a reference to the incorrect connection of the AFA to the Phelps’ hate group, which does indeed refer to homosexuals in hateful terms.

Fox News reported that “later in the briefing, the soldiers were reportedly told that they could face punishment for participating in organizations that are considered hate groups” — apparently including the AFA.

While the Pentagon insisted that the incident was nothing more than a mistake, it appears to be tied to



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earlier Army training sessions in which Catholics and Christians, as well as organizations like the AFA and the Family Research Council (FRC) were designated as hate groups, reportedly based on discredited research compiled by the ultra-radical Southern Poverty Law Center.

A statement from the AFA noted that the pro-family group “has received numerous accounts of military installations as well as law enforcement agencies using a list compiled by the Southern Poverty Law Center, which wrongfully identifies and defames AFA.”

AFA president Tim Wildmon said he is skeptical about the sincerity of the Pentagon’s *mea culpa*. “We’re hearing from too many people across the country who’ve witnessed these training sessions,” he said. “We know this is going on in the Army and the Air Force.”

Wildmon added that the AFA is “probably going to be taking legal action” in the case. “The Army has smeared us. They’ve defamed the American Family Association.”

As reported by [The New American](#), in April a U.S. Army Reserve training session in Pennsylvania included a [slide presentation](#) that listed evangelical Christianity, Catholicism, and Judaism under the label “Religious Extremism,” along with such groups as the Ku Klux Klan, the Nation of Islam, and Hamas. As noted, other military training sessions have targeted conservative groups like the AFA and the FRC.

Hiram Sasser of the conservative legal advocacy group Liberty Institute told Fox News that “the Army is going to have to fess up,” he said. “For them to keep saying there are just a bunch of rogue instructors out there is either evidence they have a massive disciplinary problem or they are full of baloney.”

He added that “you have a Christian ministry trying to do good work and you have the Department of Defense going around smearing your name and trying to turn people against you — spreading false statements about you.”

Retired Army Lieutenant General Jerry Boykin, now the executive president of the [Family Research Council](#), said that the commander responsible for the latest rogue Army briefing “should be held accountable, as should the instructor” for the bogus information. “They are using data from the Southern Poverty Law Center which is an evil, irresponsible, anti-Christian group that has appointed themselves to be the identifiers of hate groups in this country,” said Boykin in an interview with [American Family Radio](#).

Boykin recalled that several months ago “there was a battalion commander at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, who put out a broad e-mail to all of his subordinates telling them to stay away from organizations that are extremists, like American Family Association and the Family Research Council. This has to stop.”

Wildmon wondered what is behind the military’s emerging fixation on domestic activist groups. “You have to ask yourself the question: Why is the military training their personnel about domestic organizations, about what’s going on here inside the United States?” he said in an interview with American Family Radio. “Isn’t the purpose of the military to fight wars overseas?”

He added that “even if you thought the American Family Association was a hate group, what concern is that of the Army or the Air Force? They’re to fight wars against our enemies overseas.... I think what you have here [are the actions of] Obama appointees who are far-left ideologues, just like we saw with the IRS. They’re going to target conservative groups, and in our case conservative Christian groups.”

[Bryan Fischer](#), director of issues analysis with the AFA, challenged the military to stop relying on the



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Southern Poverty Law Center for information on hate groups. “They are not a credible source of information about hate or discrimination,” he said, noting that the group has been exposed “as nothing more than a fear-mongering, fund-raising scam. They’ve gotten flunking grades from the leading charity organization watchdog group in the United States because of their unethical use of donor funds.”

While the Army insists that incidents of groups like the AFA being labeled extremist are isolated and based on the actions of mis-directed trainers, a highly placed individual working with the Army’s equal opportunity division — which is responsible for organizing the briefings and seminars — said otherwise, according to Fox News’ Todd Starnes. The reporter told [American Family Radio](#) that “all these equal opportunity trainers have to go to a three-month training session at Patrick Air Force Base, and this source is telling me that when it gets to the component about extremism, these individuals are told that the Southern Poverty Law Center is a valuable resource for them to use when they go out and conduct these training sessions on the various military bases.”

Starnes added that “for the military to come out and say, ‘Oh, this is just an isolated incident, we have these rogue people,’ well, let me ask you [about] these ‘rogue people’ — Are they being punished? Are they being reprimanded? Are they being retrained?”

He challenged that as far as such training goes, “it seems like mass chaos in the Army right now, because apparently people can do whatever the heck they want to do without any oversight.”



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