



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on January 5, 2011

Navy Commander Fired Over Objectionable Videos

A U.S. Navy captain who produced and showed videos containing profanity, sexual innuendo, and slurs against homosexuals to personnel aboard the nuclear aircraft carrier USS Enterprise was relieved of command of the carrier January 4. Captain Owen Honors (left) showed the videos in 2006 and 2007 to nearly 6,000 sailors and marines while he was second in command of the vessel, but the Navy moved to discipline him only after an article about the videos appeared in the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot newspaper on January 1.



At first the Navy sought to downplay the videos, calling them “humorous skits” Owen produced to help boost the morale of the personnel aboard the ship during long deployment at sea. But as the story quickly gained prominence, the Navy called the videos “not acceptable” and said an investigation was underway. Although officials had attempted to distance themselves from knowledge of the videos, in a statement to the *Virginian-Pilot* prior to publication of the story, the Navy said that top brass had moved to put a stop to videos containing “inappropriate content” that had been shown aboard the *Enterprise* four years ago.

Finally Admiral John Harvey Jr., commander of U.S. Fleet Forces, issued a statement January 4 saying that after personally reviewing the videos he had “lost confidence” in Honors’ ability to command the *Enterprise*, which is scheduled to deploy to the Middle East later in January. “While Capt. Honors’ performance as commanding officer of *USS Enterprise* has been without incident,” said Harvey in a prepared statement, “his profound lack of good judgment and professionalism while previously serving as executive officer on *Enterprise* calls into question his character and completely undermines his credibility to continue to serve effectively in command.”

Commenting on the incident, Michael Corgan, a former Navy officer and now a professor at Boston University, said that part of Honors’ failure was not recognizing a changing military culture. “Standards shift, of course, and trimming your sails is something you have to do if you’re going to command people in the Navy,” Corgan said. “This guy showed poor judgment.” Although the recent repeal of “don’t ask, don’t tell” certainly didn’t help Honors’ case, Corgan said the Navy’s response most likely went deeper than that. “What he did would have been dumb 30, 40 years ago,” he said.

While some personnel serving aboard the *Enterprise* acknowledged that Honors’ behavior was inappropriate for a commanding officer, many who served under his command have stood up for him, even launching a [Facebook](#) page in his defense. Misty Davis, who served aboard the vessel between 2006 and 2010, portrayed Honors as an officer who cared about his personnel and who created the videos as a way to help them blow off steam during long months at sea. “He was a caring professional and, yes, he has a sense of humor, but you need that on a boat,” said Davis, adding that the videos were “no worse than anything you’d see on ‘Saturday Night Live’ or ‘The Family Guy.’”

The Navy has said that it will continue to investigate the circumstances surrounding the production and



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showing of the videos aboard the carrier, examining “the actions of other senior officers who knew of the videos and the actions they took in response.”

In light of military scandals such as the 1991 Tailhook incident, in which a number of Navy officers resigned following allegations of sexual misconduct at a Las Vegas Navy convention, some observers were left wondering if a double standard still exists in the ranks, whereby inappropriate conduct is winked at if it is kept under wraps. “He showed bad judgment and he embarrassed the Navy,” Stephen Saltzburg, general counsel of the National Institute of Military Justice, said of Honors’ behavior before the Navy relieved him of command. “Those are things that are going to be hard for the Navy to ignore or to forgive.”

In addressing the situation to the press, Pentagon spokesman Colonel Dave Lapan deflected questions as to why the Navy appeared to change its position on the seriousness of Honors’ offense, but defended the military’s overall response to inappropriate behavior. “While incidents like this ... draw a lot of attention, they are still relatively few and far between in terms of the millions of members in service doing the right thing,” he said. “And we have processes in place throughout the military services to handle actions that are inappropriate or rise to higher levels. There are always going to be people who do things they shouldn’t be doing and those people will be held accountable. The system works.”

However, one conservative group used the news to suggest that Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, might ignore discipline problems in the military that surface with the repeal of “don’t ask, don’t tell.” Noting that Mullen was chief of Naval Operations when the video incident occurred aboard the *Enterprise*, Elaine Donnelly, president of the Center for Military Readiness, argued that the admiral was charged with the responsibility of maintaining “high standards of morale and discipline in the entire Navy. Adm. Mullen failed to discharge this duty with regard to the *Enterprise*, and members of Congress should hold him accountable. Either Adm. Mullen knew what was happening on the *Enterprise*, or he did not know about the breakdown in discipline occurring on his watch. Which scenario is worse?”

Donnelly warned that the offensive and “unacceptable” behavior demonstrated by an officer of Honors’ rank does not bode well for how military conduct might deteriorate with the upcoming introduction of openly homosexual military personnel into the ranks. “Contrary to assurances that standards of conduct will remain high,” she said, “and that ‘leadership’ and sensitivity training can ‘mitigate’ the consequences of human failings, this embarrassing episode demonstrates how discipline can be incrementally redefined downward, lowering standards for all. Adm. Mullen and like-minded allies in the White House, Pentagon and Congress are inviting trouble that cannot be ‘mitigated’ by wishful thinking alone.”



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