

Cadets On Verge of Expulsion After Religious Exemption Appeals Were Denied; STARRS Is Helping

By Tracey Meck, Col, USAF (Ret), USAFA '87, STARRS Newsletter Editor-In-Chief

Only the “best of the best” are offered appointments to the U.S. service academies. The competition is tough. Of around 11,000 that start the application process, only a little over 1100 take the oath of office on the first day of Basic Cadet Training. Prospects compete against others in the top ten percent of our nation’s teenagers and young adults and must have proven themselves to be superior in academics, fitness, character and leadership.

Now, many of these cadets, several nearing the end of their senior year, are on the verge of losing not only their dream of graduating from a service academy, but also their patriotic desire to serve their country as military officers. Why? Because they have refused to receive the COVID vaccine. One West Point cadet has been court-martialed for refusing the vaccine on the basis that he has had COVID and thus has developed natural immunity. Others have refused based on religious convictions - their requests for religious exemptions are being denied virtually across the board.

According to court documents in *Hunter Doster et al Plaintiffs v Hon Frank Kendall et al Defendants*, as of 22 March, 2022 the Air Force had adjudicated 4,403 religious exemptions requests, but approved only 21 (0.47%) at the initial stage. Of those denied, the AF Surgeon General had adjudicated 1,162 appeals and only approved two. Other appeals were still working their way through the process.

The parents of a USAFA cadet whose religious exemption request was denied reported that the cadet felt pressured after the denial to take the vaccine. A week or two after the shot, the cadet developed severe headaches, nose bleeds, insomnia, fatigue and chest pains. Three weeks after the shot the cadet's blood pressure was high and heart rate elevated as well. The cadet is now on light duty pending further medical tests. His echocardiogram was normal, but they did see one thing that was concerning and mentioned potential increased blood pressure in the lungs. In high school the cadet was an all-around high school athlete. Now the cadet feels tired a lot, lacks energy to exercise and is struggling academically.

Many of the cadets whose exemption requests were denied already had COVID and developed natural immunity, which even the CDC and Pfizer admit is at least as effective at protecting people as the vaccines are. [Over 150 scientific studies have proven this](#). Yet the DoD does not recognize this fact and insists that the vaccine is required to protect the force.

STARRS believes DoD’s position is radical, especially since the vaccines have proven to have limited efficacy on the newer COVID variants like Omicron. We are committed to helping these cadets fight for their dreams. Lt Gen Bishop is in contact with the USAFA Superintendent and Mike Rose, our VP for Legal, is representing 16 Air Force cadets and 6 from West Point (WP) pro-bono, donating countless hours representing them as they fight to stay at their respective academy.

The saga began last June when DoD issued its vaccine mandate, likely under orders from the administration. There were initially around 700 cadets at West Point who declined to take the vaccine for a variety of reasons based on the emergency use authorization (EUA) status. Classification of the vaccine under EUA makes taking the vaccine optional and requires patients to be fully informed about the vaccine, its effectiveness, potential side effects, the status of testing, etc. (aka “informed consent”). As the summer of 2021 wore on, vaccine-refusing cadets were isolated from other cadets, exposed to constant pressure to change their minds, denied legal counsel, and restricted to base. Each week their numbers diminished as cadets feared losing all they had worked for, surrendered and got the shots. [A handful decided to leave the academy](#), not only because of the vaccine mandate, but also because they decided that today’s military is not what they

thought it was. They couldn't commit to an organization that treated its people so tyrannically. Others stayed to fight by submitting requests for medical and religious exemptions following DoD's guidance. Denial after denial were received, so the cadets submitted appeals.

The story was similar at the Air Force Academy, but with less tyrannical treatment. Upon return from spring break, the 16 AFA holdouts were issued letters denying their "final" appeals from Lt Gen Robert J. Miller, the AF Surgeon General (AF SG), even though in many cases (exact number unknown) chaplains had stated their applications were "sincere" (note, prior to the appeals going to the AF SG, Lt Gen Clark, USAFA Superintendent, recommended denial in each case). In the letter, Lt Gen Miller stated that if the cadets were allowed not to get the vaccine there would be "a real adverse impact on military readiness and public health and safety." As a reminder, we are talking about cadets, not members of active units subject to contingency deployment. He also stated that "There are no less restrictive means available in your circumstance as effective as receiving the above immunizations in furthering these compelling government interests." This statement completely disregards the scientifically proven effectiveness of natural immunity and proven therapeutics that are readily available, but not acknowledged by the CDC. Letters from their Air Officers Commanding (AOC) gave them five days to either get the first shot, voluntarily resign and start out-processing, or face disciplinary action and involuntary administrative separation for disobeying an order.

STARRS sprang into action. Mike Rose had been advising the West Point cadets all along, but now he is officially representing the 16 AF cadets and six of the remaining 16 WP cadets. There is an open offer from Mr. Rose to represent others as he helps the cadets sign on as plaintiffs in pending class action lawsuits (note: a [recent judicial injunction against adverse action against Navy SEALs](#) who submitted religious exemptions has been expanded to include all Navy personnel until the case is resolved by the courts, so midshipmen do not need representation at this time). In the meantime, Mr Rose has advised the cadets that if they already had COVID, they should submit requests for medical exemptions based on their natural immunity status. The case is developing daily at a significant pace.

In the meantime, Rod Bishop, STARRS President and Board Chair, has been in direct contact with USAFA Superintendent Lt Gen Richard Clark, outlining scientific evidence of the ineffectiveness of the vaccines and [the potentially severe side-effects](#) that are most prevalent in younger people, particularly males in the 18-24 age range.

Here's an excerpt from an email Lt Gen Bishop sent to Lt Gen Clark on 29 March 2022:

I don't mean to be unfair, we know you are following orders, but... Before you kick these cadets out of our Air Force--could you please help us better understand? If you think you are doing the "right thing" from a force protection point of view--would you please listen to some "common sense" from some of STARRS' experts--like Doc Scott Sturman--and if we can convince--go back to the Air Force on behalf of these young men and women and say "hey--wait a minute." Let's take a deep breath here! At the very least cadets deserve answers to the same questions [Senator Ron Johnson has asked of SECDEF Austin](#) on the DMEDS data base--to date--none have been received.

Gen Bishop followed up with another email with additional information later that day:

It appears "there is an overwhelming body of evidence forming which shows DOD is going down the wrong road with respect to kicking cadets out when they haven't complied with non-common-sense and non-science-based vaccine mandates. I sincerely hope you realize this by Saturday and stand up for your cadets--it seems pretty clear their "elimination" is an ideological-based—not science-based argument! [As a PJ Media article points out](#), VAERS isn't the most reliable database--but DMEDS should be--I certainly hope you support the cadets under your care by getting them the answers to the questions they have asked regarding the DMEDS potential fraud, or at least incompetence, before changing their lives forever. Sure seems ideological to me--not science based. Here is some of the "common sense" stuff:

1. Look what is happening in the private sector. One example: I heard yesterday United Airlines is recalling some employees who were released due to not taking the vax. If the airlines can do this, why can't our military stop mandating the vax with a much younger and healthier population than the airlines?
see: <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/03/10/united-airlines-unvaccinated-workers-can-return-to-their-jobs.html>

2. Some weeks ago, a deployed navy ship had to go to port due to excessive covid cases; 100% of the ship was vaccinated. Same happened to a cruise ship not long ago, large outbreak of cases and all the passengers were vaccinated.

But yet, we want to eliminate young healthy cadets from the service of our country because....why?

Lt Gen Clark replied to the second email stating: "Sir, thanks for your note. These are tough decisions, and I'll do my best to get to the right answers!"

In a couple follow-on emails on 1 Apr, Gen Bishop points out that "there are at least 20 lawsuits before the courts" regarding vaccine mandates and that the five-day suspense is unfair for cadets to "make the decision of a lifetime." (Some cadets haven't been able to get a lawyer yet; they have not received answers to questions they have; a cadet who has a lawyer can't speak to him because he is in a courts martial with another client; a civilian lawyer can't get answers to questions; etc, etc, etc)." Gen Bishop continues to implore Gen Clark to "Give sufficient time, ensure due process, and ensure questions are answered before cadets have to make a decision." Gen Bishop relayed the following requests:

Request #1: Please extend that deadline to a more "reasonable" time period. The civilian lawyer tells me courts usually give 30 days--could you please extend the deadline to just half that time --15 days?

Request #2 goes to helping ensure the cadets have access to "due process".

Request #3 involves helping cadets get answers to the multitude of questions they have before making a decision--questions like:

- what is the disciplinary action I would be subject to?
- will I be processed out of the Air Force?
- will I be subject to a court martial or an administrative hearing?
- will I be required to reimburse the government for my education?
- should DOD policies change given the mounting evidence of the lack of efficacy of the vaccine in fighting the newer variants of the disease, will I be allowed to return to USAFA?
- could you please give us ground truth on the controversies surrounding the DMEDs data base?
- can you give us any assurances that the huge increases in adverse reactions shown in the VAERS and DEMDS data bases are wrong?

Since communicating with the superintendent, Gen Bishop has heard from the parents of six cadets who related their appreciation for USAFA backing off the 5-day deadline and giving the cadets more time to continue legal proceedings. Following up with Gen Clark, Gen Bishop thanked him for the progress and provided him information about the Navy-wide injunction and the [AF cases](#) and lawsuits that could result in a similar AF injunction.

As STARRS has been working with cadets on the issue, we have received information about service members throughout the force facing similar problems including a US Army lieutenant who is facing a court martial for refusing to get vaccinated.

STARRS will continue the fight in whatever way we can.