

**Department of Defense Press Briefing with Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Greenert and Adm. Richardson from the Pentagon Press Briefing Room**

**Presenters: Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jonathan Greenert and Director, Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program, Adm. John Richardson  
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ADMIRAL JONATHAN GREENERT: Good afternoon, and thanks for having us this afternoon.

I'm Admiral Jon Greenert, the chief of naval operations. And I have with me the director for Navy nuclear propulsion program, Admiral John Richardson.

We're here to discuss allegations of cheating on a written qualification exam at one of our nuclear training commands.

We learned about this yesterday evening. We were alerted of the incident. And it took place in Charleston, South Carolina, at our Navy Nuclear Propulsion Command there.

The propulsion exam was allegedly shared amongst some senior enlisted operators.

And Admiral John Richardson here, he will speak more about the details of the incident and where we are so far.

To say that I'm disappointed would be an understatement. Whenever I hear about integrity issues, it's disruptive to our unit's success and it's definitely contrary to all of our core values, our Navy core values. And it affects the very basis of our ethos.

A foundation of our conduct throughout the Navy is integrity. We expect more from our sailors, especially our senior sailors, and we demand it in our training and in our operations. And we will operate to that.

The incident, I underline, does not represent the hundreds of thousands of professional sailors who are operating with honor and integrity throughout our fleet today.

We set high expectations within our Navy, particularly this program, the Navy Nuclear Propulsion Program. It has five decades of distinguished service. And it is all founded on integrity.

Our sailors are held to a standard, a very high standard, and this will not change.

So I assure you if these allegations are substantiated we will hold the appropriate sailors -- hold the appropriate people accountable. We will remain vigilant throughout the program, as we have been, as I said, for five decades.

We'll learn from this, and we'll do a case study, and we'll train on it.

John, over to you.

And then we'll take some questions.

ADMIRAL JOHN RICHARDSON: Thank you, CNO.

And, as the CNO said, I'm Admiral John Richardson the director of naval reactors. It's like I have cradle-to-grave responsibility for the Navy's nuclear propulsion program. And, as this incident involves my program, I take full responsibility for this incident.

This is mine to investigate and to correct.

I was made aware of this situation yesterday, on 3 February, when one of our sailors from the Nuclear Power Training Unit in Charleston, South Carolina, was offered to compromise his integrity, recognized that this was wrong, and reported it to the command.

The Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program aggressively focuses on managing problems, whether those are materiel, operational or personnel problems, with the intent of finding and correcting problems while they are still relatively small.

And so, in addition to self-examinations, each element of the program is examined by outside inspectors, and we aggressively respond to any problems that they find as well.

On rare occasions, an integrity incident occurs that includes an element of collusion between more senior people. For instance, for your reference, the last comparable incident of this nature took place in 2010 on board a submarine crew.

Integrity is a foundational element of our program, and when confronted with problems, we respond aggressively and forcefully.

Now, although the investigation is just beginning, I'd like to try to provide some details for your information.

This incident took place in our school. We have a one-year training program that includes six months of classroom training, theoretical training, and six months of

hands-on training. We do this in Charleston on two converted submarines that we use as training reactors to certify operators to report to the fleet.

So this is propulsion reactors, not related to nuclear weapons.

This incident involves members of the school staff who are required to qualify to operate and instruct students on the training reactor.

We operate using 11-person watch teams. So there's an 11-person team on watch when -- to operate the reactor.

This incident, as the CNO said, involves the compromise, the alleged compromise, of the written exam to qualify just one of those 11 watch stations, one of the 11 person team.

To qualify for that position, in addition to the written exam, that we are discussing and investigating, one must also pass an oral academic board given by a three-person panel, and must pass an evaluated practical exam showing satisfactory performance. From what we know so far these elements of the qualification program appear to be valid.

Once qualified, their individual on-watch performance is further evaluated by external inspectors. Evaluation by my field representatives on site and through a separate continuing training program, we have seen no major concerns from those other assessments to date.

Finally, once the staff member completes this tour at the school house and returns to the fleet, the process begins anew. They're required to requalify using the same process on the ship to which they report. And this ship -- this command, is also subject to the internal and external inspections and oversight that I have just described.

It is this philosophy of defense and (inaudible) that allows me to assure you that our Naval reactors are operating safely. This is a serious incident. As the CNO said, integrity is the foundation of our business. The training command and NCIS have begun a full investigation that will be led by a nuclear qualified submarine admiral, additional efforts to ensure that we -- will be to ensure that we have properly bound the problem.

To date, we're getting good cooperation with the investigation.

The training reactors were shut down for routine maintenance when we learned of this incident. The training command has ensured that all personnel implicated in this so far have been removed from the site. Their access has been revoked, and all current personnel on watch are those who have no element of implication.

As a precautionary measure, these personnel are also being re-tested to validate their knowledge.

Additionally, I have assigned extra supervision to the operating teams. I will not reauthorize operation of the reactors until I am personally satisfied that appropriate corrective actions have been taken and additional conservative measures have been implemented.

Additionally, I have a five person cadre of personnel from my headquarters that have flown down to the site, led by a senior Navy captain to assess the command climate in other areas and to ensure the investigation is getting started properly.

This scene will review past assessments with the goal of ensuring that we do not have a broader problem at this command.

In closing, I'd like to restate that I am fully responsible for this matter. I'm aggressively moving to address the situation. We take our record of over 55 years of safe and reliable operation of Naval nuclear propulsion plants very seriously.

While I can't provide much more information at this time, due to the ongoing investigation, I will keep you as fully informed as possible. We intend to be as transparent as possible as we work our way through this.

Thank you.

And I'm happy -- the -- answering any questions that I can, subject to the understanding that there is an active investigation going on.

Lolita?

Q: Admiral, for both of you. I was just wondering, one, if you could maybe clarify a couple of more details.

Did this involve e-mailing questions or answers to the -- to the staff? And, did it also involve any violation, possibly, of classified material or access to classified material?

And then, secondly, as you know, the Air Force has had some cheating issues also within part of their nuclear force, and their comments then that it is -- they worried that it's systemic and that this is a broad morale problem, that involves people who were cheating because they felt the need to get 100 percent, because it affected their promotions.

I'm wondering if you could address whether those are also among some of your concerns.

ADM. RICHARDSON: With respect to the exams themselves, and the nature of what we're talking about, most of that will be more fully developed in the investigation, but it's fair to say that these exams and the operation of the plants do involve classified information and that'll be an active part of the investigation to fully understand that.

With respect to the morale, we -- and -- and the necessity to pass these exams in order to advance, that's -- that's not really a dimension of our program. We do not have that -- that, you know, kind of 90 percent and above type of dynamic in our program. Our exam program is -- is different than -- than the -- the one that you mentioned for the Air Force. And so we don't really see that being a dynamic here.

But, again, you know, as I said, my team is on board to make sure that we've properly bound this. We're taking nothing for granted right now.

ADM. GREENERT: (Lolita Baldor), Admiral Richardson and I grew up in the same program, the Navy Nuclear Propulsion Program. The foundation within it is examination and reexamination, oral and written, as well as demonstration of proficiency.

So what I'm saying is it is in the -- it is in the ethos, if you will. It is in the process that folks are used to getting examinations -- getting examiner qualified in their (inaudible). Therefore, I don't perceive, as Admiral Richardson said, that there's an element of "you have to get the highest grade." Because we're constantly evaluating and self-assessing ourselves within this program.

Q: How many -- sorry -- if you've answered this, excuse me, but how many sailors have been decertified? And could you tell us a little more about how this came to light? You said one sailor had been encouraged to -- to join in. It sounded like a sort of group of people who were cheating and he came forward.

Did this not come to light because of the review that was ordered by the SECDEF in relation to the Air Force?

ADM. RICHARDSON: It did not. We were, of course, you know, looking very hard at ourselves, as we always do. So I hope the theme that emerges here is that, you know, there is a climate of introspection, of looking for problems and solving them (inaudible). So we are constantly assessing ourselves.

This did not come forward as a consequence of that ongoing thing. This was a sailor who, you know, has been fully trained from the moment he enters boot camp that integrity is a foundation of our Navy's operations and -- including the

Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program. He recognized when he was asked to join in that that's not consistent with those values, and mentioned it to the command.

Q: And how many have been decertified?

ADM. RICHARDSON: It's really, we're still bounding that problem. And so I'm hesitant to give you a number right now because I don't have a final number. But we conservatively estimate that this is probably less than 1 percent of the Naval Nuclear Propulsion force.

Q: And that would be roughly?

ADM. RICHARDSON: We have 16,000 sailors in the program.

Q: How many in Charleston?

ADM. RICHARDSON: In Charleston, it's roughly -- it's a few hundred.

ADM. GREENERT: We'll get you that number.

ADM. RICHARDSON: We'll get you the exact number.

(CROSSTALK)

Q: So we're talking about a (dozen ?) or so, aren't we?

(CROSSTALK)

Q: You say 1 percent (inaudible). Less than 20, is that what you're talking about?

ADM. RICHARDSON: That's the ballpark figure. But again, I hesitate to commit to that because we're still in a very early -- we're only 24 hours into this.

(CROSSTALK)

Q: Hi. I wanted to ask about how (inaudible) views this incident and the repercussions of it might disrupt potential budget decisions in a constrained environment for subs and carriers? And if there, you know, might be a need identified to fund some more of these internal and external investigations?

ADM. GREENERT: Well, I don't think it will affect budgetary decisions. As Admiral Richardson explained, we are constantly evaluating ourselves, especially within this program. We in fact have our Navy I.G., John has asked that team to take a look at our nuclear propulsion examining and training process. That examination has been going on how long, John?

ADM. RICHARDSON: About four months.

ADM. GREENERT: About four months. And so, finding things like this occasionally, as he's mentioned it happened four years ago on a vessel. So, I don't want to trivialize it. This is very serious, but these are the things that we are very vigilant for. We need to learn from, understand the case study and get in and train about it.

So, I don't see it right now as being something that would have a budgetary ramification. But if there is any need to fund additional evaluations, and we'll figure that out, we'll fund that. This is very important to me.

Jennifer Griffin?

Q: What will be the consequences for those who are found to be guilty of being involved in this?

ADM. RICHARDSON: I think that that's a case-by-case evaluation. We generally are pretty forceful about holding people accountable. And so, as, you know, the investigation continues and we can determine, you know, the level of culpability, the level of misconduct, then we'll evaluate that on a case basis.

Q: Would it be safe to say that if you're caught cheating, you would be kicked out of the Navy? Or what's the upper end of punishment?

ADM. RICHARDSON: That's -- certainly removed from the program, and then, you know, if -- our history is that if you are caught in an integrity violation, you're removed from the program and generally on to -- out of the Navy.

Thom Shanker?

Q: I'd like to return to the point that (Lolita Baldor) was reaching for earlier about your sense of "why now"? Rightly or wrongly, I think the general public, the taxpayer sees a contingent of cheating across the military. So what is happening now? Is it the OPTEMPO since 9/11? It's been going on for a long time, but nobody caught it? Are these just one-off and inexplicable? Why, Admiral, is this happening now?

ADM. GREENERT: Thom, if I knew that answer, I would be doing all kind of things within the Navy. But one thing is sure. We need to and we will remain vigilant. We will continue to drive home to our people the importance of integrity: the fact that it is the foundation of all that we do in the U.S. Navy. We have to believe everything that somebody says to one another. Again, it is the foundation at sea and port, and certainly in this program.

And so we will be very introspective on this. We will, as I said before, make this very much a case study, like we did previous issues that occur in this program and in others, but certainly in this program. It's founded, again, on self-inspection and good assessment.

Julian Barnes ?

Q: Admirals, two follow-ups and points of clarification. Do you think that the sailor who came forward to report this did so in part because of the attention over the Air Force issue, knowing from that that he had a duty to report what he knew and two, is there any way to describe this test in any more detail about whether it was maintaining the reactor, running a reactor, or what exactly, obviously, without getting into classified material, but what it was testing.

ADM. RICHARDSON: With respect to what the test tests, it's -- this particular is primarily on reactor operation, and so they test the theoretical level of knowledge to be able to qualify for that watch station, that position on the watch team, and that's what this exam serves in conjunction with the oral board, in conjunction with the evaluated, on-watch assessment. And so there's sort of a three layers of evaluation there.

With respect to what motivated the sailor to come forward, we have a -- a steady drum-beat in the Navy, and particular, in the Navy Nuclear Propulsion Program of -- that stresses the importance of integrity to our -- as a foundational value, and so it's hard for me to say right now what specifically motivated this sailor, but I think at the foundation he understands the importance of the value of integrity and made his report.

(OFF-MIKE)

Q: Admiral, as you know, the Air Force has had their own issues, been conducting their own reviews with cheating of nuclear missileers. Has the Navy been doing its own review of its program because of what's been going on in the Air Force? I know the secretary of defense had a meeting here at the Pentagon to talk about the broader program. What had the Navy already been doing as a result of this?

ADM. GREENERT: The answer to that is yes, the Navy has done a review of the -- what I'll call the nuclear enterprise. The -- the nuclear weapon enterprise involves two services, obviously, the Navy and the Air Force. We have our element, the (SSBM ?) force and all of its supporting entities.

We've been directed to look primarily at the personnel element of that. The qualification people of all those that organized training, and equip those that do handle or employ or field direct operations of nuclear weapons. The certification they're in and of course the personnel reliability program. And so that is in

progress. What -- what we do already, Craig, is every two years, we have a three star flag officer review, if you will, the program, coordinated with our director of our Strategic Systems Program, SSP. That Strategic Systems Program are responsible for all operations, if you will, handling of -- of our nuclear weapons themselves.

So, that has been going on. There's a drum beat of that, as Admiral Richardson said, in his program. We have a similar drum beat. Now, we are going to take the results of our most recent, which is months old, we are going to take the results of the Schlesinger Report, you remember that from a few years ago.

We're going to take the results of the Admiral Donald report, if you remember that also was a few years ago, look and see what was directed in that, review that, did we do what it said, how are we doing on that, and then we're going to do an internal assessment coordinated with that.

So, what has been looked at before? How is that going? Is it still effective, and where are we now? All of that is underway, and we're due to report in what is now about 45 days. We were assigned this a few weeks ago.

Phil Stewart?

Q: I just want to get a sense about the -- the timing of the person who came forward. Was that person indicating that there was a -- that this is a new problem, this is a fresh, one-off incident, or did the evidence suggest this might be going back awhile, this cheating might have been more -- more systemic or (inaudible) a pattern of cheating. And also, your -- your reticence to put a finger on the number, is that because you believe it's going to get much higher?

ADM. RICHARDSON: Well, that is indicative of the fact that we are just getting started, and so any number that I give you, I don't know where that's gonna go, Ray, We're just getting the (inaudible) started. And so, I'm reluctant to give you a number, because it could change. It may be bound. We just don't know.

And so, I don't want to put something out there that -- that may be accurate, but we may find more, right? So we're in the very early stages of this.

And then, I'm sorry, what was the other part of your question?

Q: Was this a new, a single...

(CROSSTALK)

ADM. RICHARDSON: So, again, part of investigation, we know that when he was confronted, you know, we learned about this yesterday. And so, in terms of the time frame, we'll get a sense for that in the investigation.

Q: This individual came forward. He was not asked, right?

ADM. RICHARDSON: No, no. He came forward of his own accord. And this just happened in the last 24 hours. And so, we wanted to get to you very early on, to let you know about this.

Q: Was this just in a pattern that has been going on for a long time, or was it -- it's just in this one-off incident that...

(CROSSTALK)

ADM. RICHARDSON: It's to be determined. We'll be back to you when we learn that.

(Bryan Bender)

Q: Bryan Bender with the Boston Globe. A couple of just points of clarification. So, to be clear, this test, in particular, is one of a series of a tests which you must perform before you're qualified.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Exactly.

Q: And then the only -- the other question was, was this test to qualify or to re-qualify someone? In other words, are they already qualified to operate the reactor and they're being retested? Or this is for a new person who's never done it, taking the test to see if they're qualified?

ADM. RICHARDSON: So, because these, the folks that we're talking about, are on the staff, they have already completed their initial qualifications as students through this same program.

They have then gone out and requalified again at sea on whether -- on the carrier or submarine that they were assigned. And now they are coming back, and there's an additional requalification process back at those training reactors.

So this will be about the third time that they will have been through this qualification sequence.

Over the top of all that, there is a continuous training program that in addition to the qualification, it is a program of lectures and clinics and education, with exams and validation along that.

So it fits into a pretty thorough network of education, qualification and validation.

To Vanden Brook?

Q: Sir, I have a question about, these were senior enlisted folks who were the instructors, for (amplification ?).

ADM. RICHARDSON: Correct.

Q: And they were giving the answers to, or offering to give answers to trainees?

ADM. RICHARDSON: No. Our understanding to date is they were giving them staff to staff. So this is so that the staff could qualify the position to operate the training reactor. You have to -- he'd have to qualify to operate that.

And then additionally, you're training students.

But we see no evidence of compromises for the students at this point.

Q: But was there anything offered in exchange for these answers?

ADM. RICHARDSON: No.

Gordon Lubold?

Q: Just to clarify, run off (Craig's ?) question, Admiral, you described what was underway, in terms of reviews and all that. I just want to see, does this incident then trigger potentially a broader investigation, not just of this incident that you've been describing, but a broader kind of wake-up call kind of investigation of the Navy's nuclear force? You see what I'm saying?

ADM. RICHARDSON: Right. We will certainly in this process of bounding the problem we will take everything that we've -- that we learned from this incident, and we will apply that to the broader force. That's just our nature, right? We use these as -- these problems as opportunities to check across the force. And so, that is part and parcel -- that's par for our course. We will do that.

ADM. GREENERT: Gordon, I think I should add, as I described to Craig, we're doing this 60-day look, involving our nuclear enterprise. We share across enterprises, the nuclear propulsion enterprise, again, the foundation is integrity, the principles are all there.

Our people serve on nuclear-powered SSDNs. And so, those elements have to be shared. So there's a lot involved in this, across, if you will.

(UNKNOWN): (OFF-MIKE)

Q: Yes, could there be any operational impact with these -- those involved with the cheating, possibly suspended? The Air Force had to suspend or restrict about 120 missileers. Is there any -- and people are pulling extra shifts.

Do you foresee any type of similar operational impact?

ADM. RICHARDSON: I could possibly foresee an impact in Charleston. We'll see if that is broader.

Q: What (inaudible) of impact would that be, sir?

ADM. RICHARDSON: The same sort of thing. So there's those folks that are implicated are gonna be removed from those responsibilities. And other folks will have to possibly pick up those duties.

Additionally, there will be a certification process before I allow any kind of operation of those plants as well.

Q: Admiral Richardson, you said the only thing comparable involved is submarine crew. Were you talking about the Memphis?

ADM. RICHARDSON: That is it, right.

Q: OK, why is it comparable?

You're talking about something that happened in a training atmosphere, and the other one is talking -- you're talking about something that happened on an attack submarine.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Right.

The elements that concern me are not so much the, you know, where it happens, but the nature of the incident, which is both on Memphis and, in this case, we have one, a violation of integrity, one of our core principles. Two, you have some kind of an, you know, collusion amongst particularly senior people. And so that -- when we -- you know, on those rare occasions that we find those two things, it's of particular concern to us. And that's why I draw parallels between those two incidents.

Louis Martinez?

QUESTION: Going to go back to your under 1 percent reference, is that to mean that's how many individuals you're looking at who might be implicated? Because I did some fuzzy math and that comes out to like under 160 personnel.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Right.

That's kind of my initial bounding of the problem, and so, you know, pending further investigation that's kind of where I see it right now.

Q: In terms of what?

In terms of what? In terms of...

ADM. RICHARDSON: Personnel that will be implicated.

Q: (OFF-MIKE) Sorry, she asked before (inaudible)...

(CROSSTALK)

ADM. RICHARDSON: Sixteen thousand personnel in the plant. And so, used to -- I mean, one percent of 16,000 I think is 160, but in terms of the ballpark figure, you know, it's -- it's well less than that. So when you said 16, that's I think -- yeah, you're gonna be closer.

Again, it's hard to say. I just am very reluctant to declare a number at this time, because as I said...

Q: (OFF-MIKE) certified, that's what I'm having a problem with, because you don't want to give a number. It's between 16 and 160, but if you actually de-certify people, there would be a number.

ADM. RICHARDSON: And I just -- in terms of the number de-certified, it's, you know, part of this entire program. So I just am reluctant to -- you know, to get a sense for where we stand right now in an ongoing investigation.

Q: Follow up.

How many of these teams are there? I mean, you're talking about an 11 person team. How many teams are there in this unit...

ADM. RICHARDSON: There are five different shifts that operate. So -- so there are five of those teams that operate in shift work, and you know, we essentially do 24-7 training there on -- on a shift work basis.

Q: This is the universe that you're looking at?

ADM. RICHARDSON: Well, we're looking across the entire program. So we'll start there. That's where our concern is most acute right now. We'll make sure that we have taken a look at the entire program to ensure we bound this.

(UNKNOWN): Admiral, thank you.

And if there's any follow up questions just please press the Navy News desk or e-mail me.

Thank you, very much.