

JUSTICE IN OKLAHOMA; SOLDIER'S RIGHTS RESTORED

Within hours of registering a formal complaint with the top Army brass at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, a female Catholic soldier's rights were restored. More important, reforms were immediately put into place guaranteeing the religious liberty rights of Catholics on the base.

After learning that a female soldier enrolled in Advanced Individual Training at the base had thrice been denied the opportunity to go to Mass on Sundays, Bill Donohue wrote to Major General Mark McDonald at Fort Sill's U.S. Army Fires Center of Excellence.

Donohue noted that the "battle buddy" system they have requires soldiers to travel in pairs. He conceded that this arrangement surely has its merits, but he hastened to say that "it is not an adequate defense to deny someone her constitutional rights simply because there are no other Catholics in her unit." He added that a cadre escort "would resolve this matter, while not doing anything to undermine the policy of moving about in pairs."

The Catholic League president personalized his concerns. "I am a veteran of the U.S. Air Force, and have nothing but respect for the men and women of the armed services. But I am also the president of the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization, and as such, I take anti-Catholicism very seriously, regardless of the motive of the offender."

Donohue called for an investigation into this matter. He was pleased when he received an e-mail indicating that his complaint was being taken seriously. Donohue then called the base and spoke to the official who had contacted him. The conversation was amicable, and it resulted in assurances that

a cadre escort service would be arranged for those soldiers who lacked a fellow Catholic to “buddy” with. Case closed.

The reason we jumped on this issue transcended the incident at Fort Sill. There is an attack on the religious liberty rights of Catholics and Protestants in the armed forces, and in the military academies. Militant atheists are driving it, and obsequious officers are yielding to the pressure. We refuse to do so.

The goal is to censor religious expression in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and the Coast Guard, as well as on the campuses of the academies. The stakes are high: If the professional atheists can win there, they can win anywhere. This isn't about fidelity to the First Amendment—it's about trampling on it. Atheists are not being persecuted by the faithful; it's the other way around.

We are happy that this incident ended quickly and fairly.