

Sarah Cayia
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To whom it may concern,

First, thank you for the opportunity for me to share my story with you. This is my personal statement and does not reflect the opinions of the FLARNG or any NGB entity. I have been serving in the Guard for almost 16 years. I left the MEARNG and transferred to the FLARNG in March of 2021 which was the best thing that happened to me. I was able to escape the toxic world of the MEARNG. I'm able to continue serving my country and feel safe and respected while doing so. I didn't even realize just how bad the MEARNG is until I was able to experience a different organization. If I were still in the MEARNG I would most likely not be making this statement out of fear of repercussion. Today I'm speaking for not only myself; this statement is also for those women still serving that fear retaliation and cannot speak today.

I served in the Maine Guard since October of 2006 and was an AGR starting in October 2012. I have received various awards over my career- AAMs, ARCOMs, NCO of the year at the BN level, Governor's herold for the 2015 state of the state address and the list goes on. I tell you these things not to brag but so you can understand that I'm a good Soldier. I have served with many great people, I don't want to paint the MEARNG with a broad brush; there are some great Soldiers.

Unfortunately I'm not here to talk about them. I'm here to address specifically the AGR community where there resides some of the most foul and corrupt leaders I've ever served with that have been allowed to go unchecked. It's a warped community. Sexual comments are accepted and considered "funny", and you feel like you have to talk like that to be part of the group. If you tell someone their jokes aren't funny then you aren't one of the "cool" people which means you don't get selected for special duties/trips which has other ripple effects that impact your career. It wasn't until I came to Florida I was allowed to be part of a demobilization for Soldiers returning from deployment. It was a great experience to finally be a part of and I learned so much on that trip to make me better at my job. That was reserved for the "click" that wanted to go down to a demob site and drink together.

I have numerous names and specific events over the last 10 years of incidents that were highly inappropriate, sexual harassment and misconduct. I am truly fearful to divulge their names because they are key senior leaders in the AGR community. I know that beyond a shadow of a doubt some still serving would face repercussions for my actions if I divulge their names. If anyone tries to tell you that wouldn't happen they are lying to you! Please don't believe them. These leaders know who they are- I hope they're listening right now!

Here are a few examples of things that have happened to me:

- 1) I've been asked "If you were a hooker, how much would you charge me" This coming from a married E8 man, still serving and got promoted to E9. For those wondering if he was just kidding- he wasn't!
- 2) I've had a married officer supervisor show up at my home looking for me. Just to "check on me" It was deemed appropriate because that's just being a good "battle buddy" as the military puts it. Granted I was going through a lot during this time, but I don't think it's EVER okay to have a man (single or married) alone show up at your home. This same supervisor verbally counseled me for not telling him when I was separating from my boyfriend- told me it was his business to know. When I started dating my now fiance he told me he didn't approve of him, that he was bad for me. He'd tell me "you probably don't mean anything to him, you're just another one for him".
- 3) I sat in meetings regarding a Soldier that won Miss Maine and was competing for Miss USA. She was ridiculed for wanting to participate in the competition and treated unfairly. I witnessed the conversations had about her.
- 4) One of the top officers in the state told me I "reminded him of a 'female pay branch manager', she's smart just like you. Too smart for your own good". Maybe this officer is threatened by smart women but regardless it's an inappropriate comment to make. Additionally, due to his toxic leadership style he called a meeting with all E-7 and above AGRs to discuss concerns with the environment. After I addressed my concerns with him he told me "what do you expect? Do you want me to give you a little pat on the ass every time you do something right?" Again, highly inappropriate comment for an O6 to make to a female subordinate.

5) A coworker/friend confided in me that her supervisor was cornering her after work and forcing himself on her. I asked her if she wanted help and to report him. She said no and to not tell anyone because he was/is so well liked that it would get turned around on her. And I didn't tell anyone because I knew she was right. It's a sick organization.

6) When I was a recruiter, I'd have to call units to get position numbers for new Soldiers wanting to join. Certain units would ask if my female applicants were hot before they'd give me a position number. It was disgusting. And I felt absolutely powerless to change any of it. I felt horrible because I had parents trusting me with their children and I knew the environment I was putting their kids in.

After all these incidents, I'm sure you're wondering why I never reported any of them. Honestly, I am ashamed to admit that I did nothing. The biggest reason is retaliation. The AGR community is SO small, everyone talks and no one ever forgets. Everyone is someone's friend and grudges are held. There is a "good ole boys" system in place. Any senior leader that denies that is either blind, ignorant or flat out lying. When I was the Senior HR NCO in the Engineer Battalion I was privy to meetings regarding an AGR that they wanted to get rid of- they discussed moving him from southern Maine to northern Maine in hopes it would put a hardship on him and he'd just retire. They discussed putting a spin on it and telling people it could be a broadening assignment where he would gain experience working with different units. All of that was just a facade, and guess what....that gentleman ended up retiring...

I am one of the lucky ones...I made it out on the other side and I'm happy. I've just been accepted into the FLARNG AGR program. I've been on ADOS orders since June of last year. I had no idea how bad the MEARNNG really was until I got to work in a professional environment where I was treated with dignity and respect.

I'm pleading with you to please open an investigation into MEARNNG! And specifically the senior level leaders in the AGR MEARNNG program! If the MEARNNG truly has nothing to hide and feels there are no problems then they should welcome an investigation. But if they keep persisting there are no issues and do NOT want an investigation... I beg you to wonder why that might be.... please help us!

Respectfully, Sergeant First Class Sarah Cayia