WEST POINT ANNOUNCES BAN ON “UNPROFESSIONAL SPIRIT EVENTS” – Nov. 25, 2015

WEST POINT, N.Y. – After completing two separate investigations into an August 20 pillow fight that left more than two dozen cadets injured, the Commandant of the United States Military Academy at West Point announced today that he has taken official action to ban the event in all future years along with “any other unprofessional spirit events” not sanctioned by academy officials.

“The pillow fight is not an officially sanctioned event (and is) not based on any recorded tradition,” wrote Col. Karl Meyer, Ph.D, who led an Army 15-6 investigation into the incident. In his report, Meyer recommended that West Point discontinue the event in future years through written guidance that would include warnings of possible disciplinary actions against cadets who “have been a part of initiating, coordinating or taking part in the event in any capacity.”

Academy Superintendent Lt. Gen. Robert Caslen ordered the investigation after 30 students were injured in the large-scale pillow fight between members of the school’s first-year class, known as plebes. A total of 30 cadets were treated at Keller Army Community Hospital for a range of injuries; 24 were diagnosed with concussions.

"I said at the time that we are committed to the development of leaders of character, and this investigation showed that this event has no place in the future of the academy or the development of the Army’s next generation of leaders,” Caslen said. “While never officially sanctioned, it is now officially banned, and we will take appropriate action to ensure that all faculty, staff, leaders, the Corps of Cadets and everyone at West Point knows that it will not be tolerated.”

Following the August incident, there were allegations that some cadets were injured by hard objects placed in pillow cases, but the Army’s investigation disproved those early reports. Doctors who treated the injured “stated explicitly that the injuries…were not consistent with having been struck by hard objects like helmets, lock boxes, flashlights or other objects…rumored to have been in the pillow cases,” the report says. “Many injuries were the result of Cadets having been hit by elbows or other body parts during the scuffle of the pillow fight or from simply falling or being knocked to the ground,” it read. Doctors stated that if “Cadets had been struck by hard objects, they would have expected to see fractures, hematomas or lacerations.”
However, one cadet was identified by military police as striking another cadet with a hard object in a pillow case. The victim has not been identified nor was the victim one of those who received medical attention. Nevertheless, the cadet named in the investigation is pending administrative discipline. Regardless of the severity of injuries, Caslen said that he is pursuing action against many of those involved, including leaders who should have done more as the event escalated.

“The investigations found ineffective communication between cadet leadership and senior military personnel that might have prevented this from occurring in the first place,” he said. “I’m troubled by the failure to mitigate and lead, and by the conduct of those whose actions contributed to this incident. I am taking appropriate action based on these findings – to include administrative actions against senior military members and cadets alike – to send a clear message that this kind of behavior will not be tolerated at our nation’s premiere military academy.”

The investigation report can be found here (click to read).

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