

**REPORT OF INVESTIGATION:
VICE ADMIRAL SEAN S. BUCK
U.S. NAVY**

I. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Allegation Origin

This investigation of Vice Admiral (VADM) Sean L. Buck, U.S. Navy, Superintendent, U.S. Naval Academy (USNA) examines his statements to senior Navy officials about the disenrollment proceedings against then-Midshipman First Class (MIDN) (b)(6), (b)(7)(C).¹ We received an allegation that, on three occasions, VADM Buck made false official statements when VADM Buck asserted that MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) said he would use military force against civilians.²

MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) posted over 40 tweets from June 7 through 15, 2020, including at least six tweets suggesting the use of violence and military force against civilians in the United States. In accordance with USNA processes, VADM Buck interviewed MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) on September 23, 2020 (hereafter “the interview”), asking MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) questions about his tweets. After the interview, VADM Buck recommended in a memorandum dated November 12, 2020, to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Manpower and Reserve Affairs (ASN[M&RA]) (hereafter “the memorandum”), that MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) be disenrolled from the USNA. The memorandum stated, in part, that MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) expressed remorse and apologized for his tweets, but VADM Buck had lost confidence in MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) judgment; therefore, VADM Buck recommended that MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) be disenrolled from the USNA.

On February 18, 2021, approximately 5 months after VADM Buck’s interview with MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C), (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) convened a conference call with VADM Buck and senior staff members to discuss the status of MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) ongoing litigation with the Navy concerning former Secretary of the Navy Kenneth J. Braithwaite’s decision to disenroll MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C). According to (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C), during the conference call, VADM Buck recounted an exchange he had with MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) in which he asked MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) “Would you use military force to bomb rioters?” and MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) replied, “Yes.” (b)(3) (b)(6) (b)(7)(C) told us that this statement contradicted information in VADM Buck’s memorandum reflecting MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) expression of remorse and apology for his tweets.

This allegation was referred to the DoD Office of Inspector General (DoD OIG) on April 9, 2021. The referral included information that VADM Buck also made a similar statement on two other occasions—to former Secretary Braithwaite during his consideration of VADM Buck’s disenrollment recommendation, and to (b)(3) (b)(6) (b)(7)(C) on February 24, 2021.

¹ Disenrollment” refers to procedures used by the USNA to separate midshipmen from the USNA in cases involving unsatisfactory conduct. MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) sued the Navy, which we discuss later in the report, and ultimately the Navy allowed him to graduate from the USNA, receive a commission as an ensign on May 28, 2021, and enter active duty. However, for consistency and simplicity, we refer to him as “MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)” throughout this report. Midshipmen progress through the ranks similar to civilian universities; for instance, a freshman is a midshipman fourth class, a sophomore is a midshipman third class, a junior is a midshipman second class, and a senior is a midshipman first class.

² The terms “rioters” and “protesters” may have different connotations to different people. Therefore, throughout this report, we used the word each witness used.

The following sections of this report provide the detailed results of our investigation. We first provide background information about VADM Buck, USNA, and adjudication of MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) conduct. We also provide information about VADM Buck's:

- interview with MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) on September 23, 2020;
- memorandum recommending disenrollment dated November 12, 2020;
- conference call with (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) and others on February 18, 2021;
- purported communication with former Secretary Braithwaite; and
- office visit with (b) (6), (b) (7) on February 24, 2021.

Finally, we present our overall analysis, conclusion, and recommendations.

II. BACKGROUND

VADM Buck and the USNA

VADM Buck assumed duties as the USNA Superintendent on July 26, 2019. According to the USNA, it prepares young men and women to become professional officers of competence, character, and compassion in the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps. USNA students are midshipmen who attend the academy for 4 years, graduating with Bachelor of Science degrees and commissions as ensigns in the Navy or second lieutenants in the Marine Corps. After graduation and commissioning, the graduates serve at least 5 years on active duty.

Adjudication of MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) Alleged Misconduct

The USNA followed its process for investigating MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) tweets and determined his conduct was contrary to Navy Core Values and good order and discipline. As a result, the USNA started its process pursuant to section 8462 of title 10, United States Code, to determine whether to disenroll MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) for unsatisfactory conduct or inaptitude. Consistent with USNA processes, the USNA Deputy Commandant and the USNA Chief of Staff conducted separate hearings with MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) and recommended on August 6, 2020, and September 14, 2020, respectively, that MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) be disenrolled.⁶

VADM Buck conducted his required interview of MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) on September 23, 2020. At the conclusion of the interview, VADM Buck told MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) he would recommend disenrollment. A week later, on September 30, 2020, MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) filed a lawsuit in Federal court to prevent his disenrollment from the USNA and separation from the Navy. The court allowed the Navy to continue with disenrollment proceedings on November 9, 2020, but precluded the Navy from implementing any decision to disenroll and separate MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) pending the court's disposition of MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) lawsuit. On November 12, 2020, VADM Buck signed the memorandum to the ASN(M&RA), recommending that MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) be disenrolled from the USNA, separated from the Navy, and required to reimburse the Navy for his USNA tuition of \$174,753.

⁶ USNA Instruction 1610.6 also requires, in most instances, that the Superintendent interview the midshipman to determine whether the midshipman's conduct was unsatisfactory and whether the midshipman should be disenrolled. USNA Instruction 1610.6, "U.S. Naval Academy Midshipmen Disenrollment Procedures for Cases Involving Unsatisfactory Conduct," June 19, 2012, governed these procedures at the time and was replaced by USNA Instruction 1610.6A on March 25, 2021.