

**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.

In a memorandum dated January 15, 2021, former Secretary Braithwaite approved VADM Buck's recommendation that MIDN (b)(6),(b)(7)(C) be disenrolled from the USNA, separated from the Navy, and required to reimburse the Navy for his tuition to fulfill his military service.⁷

III. ANALYSIS OF THE ALLEGATION

Chronology of Significant Events

Table 1 lists the significant events related to this investigation.

Table 1. *Chronology of Significant Events*

| Date | Event |
|----------------|---|
| Sept. 23, 2020 | VADM Buck interviews MIDN (b)(6),(b)(7)(C) about his tweets and informs MIDN (b)(6),(b)(7)(C) that he recommends disenrollment from the USNA and separation from the Navy. |
| Sept. 30, 2020 | MIDN (b)(6),(b)(7)(C) files a lawsuit in Federal court to prevent his disenrollment from the USNA and separation from the Navy. |
| Nov. 9, 2020 | The court allows the Navy to continue with disenrollment proceedings, but precludes 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. |
| Nov. 12, 2020 | VADM Buck signs a memorandum to the ASN(M&RA) and recommends that MIDN (b)(6),(b)(7)(C) be disenrolled from the USNA. VADM Buck also provides a copy of his memorandum to MIDN (b)(6),(b)(7)(C) for rebuttal. |
| Dec. 22, 2020 | The court grants a Government motion to dismiss MIDN (b)(6),(b)(7)(C) lawsuit because the Navy has not made a final decision on whether MIDN (b)(6),(b)(7)(C) should be disenrolled. |
| Jan. 15, 2021 | Secretary Braithwaite concurs with VADM Buck's recommendation and decides to disenroll MIDN (b)(6),(b)(7)(C) from the USNA, beginning the process for disenrollment. |
| Jan. 20, 2021 | Secretary Braithwaite departs office and (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) assumes duties. |
| Jan. 21, 2021 | MIDN (b)(6),(b)(7)(C) is served with former Secretary Braithwaite's January 15, 2021 decision and files a request in Federal court seeking to reopen his lawsuit to prevent his disenrollment from the USNA. The court reopens the lawsuit. |
| Feb. 18, 2021 | (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) conducts a conference call with VADM Buck and other senior Navy officials to discuss the litigation concerning MIDN (b)(6),(b)(7)(C) disenrollment. VADM Buck comments on MIDN (b)(6),(b)(7)(C) statements about the use of military force against civilians. |
| Feb. 19, 2021 | (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) calls former Secretary Braithwaite to ask about former Secretary Braithwaite's rationale for approving MIDN (b)(6),(b)(7)(C) disenrollment. |
| Feb. 23, 2021 | (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) decides to settle the lawsuit and allow MIDN (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) to remain at the USNA. |
| Feb. 24, 2021 | VADM Buck meets with (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) and again comments on MIDN (b)(6),(b)(7)(C) statements about the use of military force against civilians. |
| Apr. 9, 2021 | (b)(3) (b)(6) (b)(7)(C) |
| May 7, 2021 | The DoD OIG initiates this investigation. |

Source: The DoD OIG.

⁷ The Secretary of the Navy delegated the authority to discharge a midshipman to the ASN(M&RA). In the case regarding MIDN (b)(6),(b)(7)(C), former Secretary Braithwaite ultimately decided to retain that authority for himself.