

Clinton fails to meet military standard

By Robert B. Adolph Jr.

Fayetteville

The president's recent address to the nation concerning the Monica Lewinsky affair strikes me as one of the worst performances by a sitting president in modern times. What many Americans might fail to appreciate is that Bill Clinton is commander in chief of the armed forces of the United States. As such, he should be held to the same standards of conduct as those currently serving their country in uniform. Of course, in all probability, he won't be held to the same standard. And because he won't, the morale of the armed forces will suffer.

Some may remember B-52 bomber pilot Kelly Flinn, who was discharged from the Air Force for lying about having an affair with an enlisted man. Pay close attention. Flinn was not removed from the military for having a sexual affair with a subordinate. She was discharged for lying about it. Military officers are generally held to a higher standard of conduct than politicians because of the need for absolute trust among those who carry the burden of the defense of the nation.

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The president apologized. Most Americans are willing to forgive a man who sincerely feels remorse. Still, if Kelly Flinn apologized to the American people even at this late date, she would still not be reinstated in the Air Force. She lied to her superiors. Clinton lied to his superiors — the American people. You be the judge.

The president admitted to lying to and misleading the American people, and still some would give him full marks for his self-serving four-minute speech. Yes, perhaps Clinton has told the truth at last. But he did not come forth voluntarily or of his own free will. Kenneth Starr, a special prosecutor, and a grand jury composed of citizens forced him to tell the truth.

Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen recently announced new, more restrictive military policies governing sexual relationships between seniors and subordinates in the armed forces. He also promised a new military legal look at the issue of adultery. The secretary must have been badly chagrined during his commander in chief's speech. How could he possibly explain this to the soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines of our armed services? What can he say,

after his president so completely failed to meet the standard every young sergeant or lieutenant must meet or be removed from further service?

One of Clinton's few apologists was Massachusetts Rep. Barney Frank. Frank claims that the president's sexual behavior was a "private" matter. Frank, a Democrat, is dead wrong. It is a public matter. Why? What he did was public because he engaged in these sexual acts in his office, the office of the president of the United States. Then he lied about it to the American people. That's public.

When the president reminded us that "even presidents have private lives," he told us nothing we did not know. His behavior ceased to be private when he broke the rules and had a sexual relationship with a very young female intern, gave her gifts, and tried to find her a job by using his influence through his friend, Vernon Jordan.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy both had secret sexual affairs while serving as president. They were not the first, nor are they likely to be the last. But neither man lied about it to the American people. Neither man quibbled over "legal definitions." Neither man went after junior interns.

Strangely, where are the feminists? Why

aren't feminists across America demanding Bill Clinton's head on a platter? Be assured that had this happened to a sitting Republican president, feminists in every major city in the United States would be all over this issue like white on rice. It seems that the American feminist movement has a decidedly selective sense of moral outrage.

We cannot know if we can believe the president concerning whether or not he may have attempted to convince Monica Lewinsky to lie about the affair. He has clearly lied to the American people at least once. He may have lied before, and may lie again. Surely the president is now suffering from a serious lack of credibility with the armed forces. The sad fact is that few in uniform trust him or believe in him. The commander in chief has all but completely lost the respect of his uniformed subordinates — not a positive situation, should we have to go to war under his administration.

President Nixon felt compelled to resign the office of president for two reasons: (1) He was soon to be impeached. (2) His actions diminished the office of the president. Bill Clinton has clearly diminished the office. But at least as important, he has failed to meet the military standard of proper conduct concerning subordinates. Resignation is the only honorable course of action for an honorable commander in chief.

Adolph is a retired U.S. Army Special Forces lieutenant colonel who holds master's degrees in national security studies and strategy and international affairs. He currently works as a Special Operations Analyst at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg.



Adolph