

## The DoD Times (Redacted)



### ***“It’s Accountability Within the System that We Have Established” – When Saving Face Becomes the Mission***

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**Did You Know:** Image Preservation Has Become the DoD’s Top Mission Priority. The [U.S. Navy repeatedly lied](#) to Service Members and their families falsely telling them their household water supply was safe. In fact, the water was contaminated with jet fuel caused by a fuel storage leak that entered the drinking water well. The U.S. Navy persists in not holding the responsible officers accountable.

In late November 2021, a petroleum release from the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility contaminated the Red Hill [drinking water well](#). Hundreds of families, living on Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam (JBPHH) and the Army’s Aliamanu Military Reservation and Red Hill Housing, reported petroleum odors coming from residential tap water supplied by the U.S. Navy water system. Residents reported health symptoms arising from the contaminated drinking water.

For over two weeks after the spill, the Navy [lied](#) about the contamination, consistently claiming the drinking / showering water in the area was safe, despite families reporting that the water reeked of jet fuel and that thousands began feeling ill effects after [drinking it](#).

In total, 14 officers received non-punitive "[letters of censure](#)" for the failures during the Red Hill scandal. [All these officers](#) were reassigned, asked to retire, or were already retired. In an interview on "[60 Minutes](#)", which aired this past Sunday, Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Energy, Installations, and Environment) [Meredith Berger](#) was asked how the U.S. Navy could possibly consider non-punitive letters of censure as real accountability. Her embarrassingly bumbled response was, ironically, the perfect admission of what we all know to be true – an encapsulation of the U.S. Navy’s, and Department of Defense’s, institutionalized systems of protection: ***“It’s accountability within the system that we have established.”***

We couldn’t have said it better ourselves, Madam Secretary.

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For this quote reflects the DoD's true priority: save face – above all else; above the mission of defense of the nation and above the care of the people in your stead (like the families poisoned by Red Hill). It is a sickening pattern of behavior we see more and more from our military leadership when called into question: deny, deflect, discount, discredit, and gaslight. And when all of those finally fail, they fall back to the last resort: the truth.

But in that playbook, one thing is markedly absent: true accountability, true acceptance of responsibility. There are junior and mid-level enlisted and officers serving right now in today's military that are enduring career and life-impacting *punitive* administrative action for having done far less than what transpired at Red Hill. They are “flagged”, they are given Letters of Reprimand, or GOMORs.

As for the leaders that not only failed at Red Hill, but that lied in doing so: retirement and relocation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Assistant Secretary sidestepped the fact that retirees remain subject to the punitive punishments according 10 U.S. Code § 802 - Art. 2. And *that* is “accountability within the system that we have established” for leaders of today's military institution.

If only you knew how true your words were, Ms. Berger...

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