From: [Redacted], USN
To: Commander, Carrier Strike Group NINE

Subj: COMMAND INVESTIGATION INTO COMPLAINTS OF TOXIC COMMAND CLIMATE AND SEX DISCRIMINATION ABOARD USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70)

Ref: (a) JAGMAN, CH-1
(b) OPNAVINST 5354.1H
(c) US Navy Regulations

Encl: (1) Commander, Naval Surface Force, Pacific Fleet, ltr 5041 Ser N01/435 of 9 Aug 23
(2) Naval Criminal Investigative Service Tip ID 840-M39660 of 4 Aug 23
(3) Commander, Carrier Strike Group NINE Investigating Officer ltr of 18 Aug 23
(4) Congressional Inquiry dated 01 Sep 23
(5) Commander, Carrier Strike Group NINE Extension ltr of 14 Sep 23
(6) Commander, Naval Surface Force, Pacific Fleet, ltr 5041 Ser N01/456 of 31 Aug 23
(7) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 21 Aug 23 Interview
(8) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 21 Aug 23 Interview
(9) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 21 Aug 23 Interview
(10) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 21 Aug 23 Interview
(11) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 21 Aug 23 Interview
(12) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 21 Aug 23 Interview
(13) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 21 Aug 23 Interview
(14) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 21 & 22 Aug 23 Interviews
(15) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 21 Aug 23 Interview
(16) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 21 Aug 23 Interview
(17) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 21 Aug 23 Interview
(18) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 21 Aug 23 Interview
(19) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 21 Aug 23 Interview
(20) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 21 Aug 23 Interview
(21) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 21 & 25 Aug 23 Interview
(22) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 21 Aug 23 Interview
(23) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 22 Aug 23 Interview
(24) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 22 Aug 23 Interview
(25) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 22 Aug 23 Interview
(26) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 22 Aug 23 Interview
(27) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 22 Aug 23 Interview
(28) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 22 Aug 23 Interview
(29) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 22 Aug 23 Interview
(30) Voluntary Statement from [Redacted], USN, of 22 Aug 23 Interview
Subj: COMMAND INVESTIGATION INTO COMPLAINTS OF TOXIC COMMAND CLIMATE AND SEX DISCRIMINATION ABOARD USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70)

Preliminary Statement

1. Pursuant to enclosure (1) and in accordance with reference (a), enclosures (1) through (51) are submitted in support of the findings of fact and opinions for the command investigation into Inspector General complaint (202302882) of 9 August 2023, regarding an allegation of sex discrimination and toxic command climate, to include verbal and physical abuse onboard USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70).

2. This report does not include as enclosures the statements of witnesses who did not contribute any relevant information to the investigation. The complete list of witnesses, including those whose statements are not included as enclosures, is in paragraph 4.

3. There were three total anonymous complaints filed regarding USS LAKE ERIE; all complaints alleged toxic command climate and/or sexual discrimination. Consequently, the investigation focused largely on these two allegations.

4. Personnel Contacted:

   a. CAPT Danielle Defant, Commanding Officer, USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70)

   b. [Redacted], USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70)

   c. [Redacted], USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70)
Subj: COMMAND INVESTIGATION INTO COMPLAINTS OF TOXIC COMMAND CLIMATE AND SEX DISCRIMINATION ABOARD USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70)

Officer, USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70)
5. All objectives of the appointing order have been met.

6. CAPT Danielle Defant is the Commanding Officer of USS LAKE ERIE. USS LAKE ERIE is a guided missile cruiser commissioned in 1993, and she completed an extended 22-month shipyard period on 1 April 2022. Exiting a shipyard environment after an extended period of time is a challenging period for any ship due to bringing shipboard equipment online for the first time following an extended outage and the lack of operational experience and qualifications within the ship’s crew. For context, all interviews were conducted nearly 14 months following CAPT Defant’s assumption of command of USS LAKE ERIE on 22 July 2022. To better understand the timeline of potential climate toxicity, the Investigating Officer interviewed khaki leadership who had served on board USS LAKE ERIE under Captain Defant but have since transferred. Consequently, several prior mid-level and command-level leaders were interviewed. Due to the scope and timeframe of the investigation dating back nearly 14 months, time impacted the ability of some witnesses to recall specific details of certain events, including when and how they transpired. The Investigating Officer attempted to correlate certain events recalled differently by multiple witnesses, and noted when it was not possible to do so.

7. Interviews were captured utilizing a voice recorder and were predominantly done in person due to the desire to focus on personal interaction, face-to-face interviews, and the opportunity to observe demeanor and body language to best assess credibility. Some interviews were conducted via telephone, also utilizing a voice recorder. Full transcriptions were captured and presented in enclosures 7 through 52.

8. The investigation revolves largely on the Commanding Officer’s manner of reacting to or correcting perceived deficiencies in the performance of her crew, particularly her Officers. In an effort to characterize behaviors that witnesses either observed or had knowledge of, the Investigating Officer used the following terminology to characterize the Commanding Officer’s actions: warranted/unwarranted, excessive/not excessive, and professional/unprofessional. For the purposes of this report, a warranted reaction is defined as one in which the deficiency identified justified either attention or some corrective action by the Commanding Officer. An excessive reaction is defined as one in which the action taken by the Commanding Officer to address the deficiency was more than necessary to correct the behavior. A professional reaction is defined as one in which the action taken by the Commanding Officer was in alignment with behavior expected of and commensurate with the position of Commanding Officer. These terms are used at various times to describe both the observations of witnesses and the professional judgement of the Investigating Officer, and are identified as such.

9. The Navy does not define a toxic work environment. Therefore, the Investigating Officer used the following terminology from open-source publications in order to assess the level of toxicity, if present. Toxic command climates generally have leaders with a combination of self-centered attitudes, motivations, and behaviors that have adverse effects on subordinates, the organization, and mission performance. To be classified as toxic, the counterproductive behaviors must also be
Subj: COMMAND INVESTIGATION INTO COMPLAINTS OF TOXIC COMMAND CLIMATE AND SEX DISCRIMINATION ABOARD USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70)

recurrent. Toxic leaders also exhibit a lack of care and respect for their subordinates and low emotional intelligence, projected as frequent emotional outbursts, a lack of self-awareness and empathy, and failure to listen to those around them. A toxic command climate also has destructive effects on the individuals who are subjected to it. Lastly, the prohibited behaviors encompassed in the Navy’s Harassment and Military Equal Opportunity Program, reference (b) can contribute to a toxic command climate.

10. Legal guidance was provided by Commander, Carrier Strike Group NINE, Staff Judge Advocate, (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) JAGC, USN.

11. Any social security numbers have been redacted.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Findings of Fact on Hitting/Touching by the Commanding Officer

Hitting/Touching of (Sea and Anchor, Late 2022)

1. In or around November 2022, (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) was Conning Officer for an inbound San Diego sea and anchor evolution. The volume was loud on the bridge and (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) had a hard time hearing the helmsman’s repeat-back. At one point following an instance when (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) did not hear the helmsman’s repeat-back, the CO smacked (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) on her collar bone and said “Pay attention.” (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) stated the smack did not hurt, but “It freaked her out.” (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) stated that she did not want to continue being on the bridge after that but felt that she had to. She briefly considered just giving the CO the Conn and leaving. [Enclosure (21)]

2. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) recalled (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) approached him the same day and told him that the CO hit while on watch on the bridge. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) stated he was not clear on how to advise based on the fact that the incident involved the CO. [Enclosure (40)]

3. In early August 2023, (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) approached her Department Head, (b) (6), (b) (7)(C), about the CO hitting (b) (6), (b) (7)(C). [Enclosure (21, 32)]

4. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) told (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) that while she was Conning Officer during a sea and anchor detail evolution, the CO pushed her aside “rather aggressively,” ostensibly to re-position (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) [Enclosure (19)]

5. Captain Defant did not recall this incident. [Enclosure (51)]

Hitting/Touching of (Mooring to a Buoy, Mid 2023)

6. Around May/June 2023 while conducting a moor to a buoy evolution off San Diego, (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) was standing Conning Officer and (b) (6), (b) (7)(C), the (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) was standing Officer of the Deck (OOD). The CO asked out loud “Do I have a safe bearing?” and (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) answered in the affirmative. In response, the CO approached (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) grabbed him by his uniform near his collar, pulled him towards her, and whispered in
Subj: COMMAND INVESTIGATION INTO COMPLAINTS OF TOXIC COMMAND CLIMATE AND SEX DISCRIMINATION ABOARD USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70)

ear “Was I talking to you...You’re not the...I was talking to the OOD...don’t ever interrupt me again” or words to that effect. [Enclosure (14, 16)]

7. Following the grabbing of by the CO, went to talk to the CO, to discuss his concerns about the CO’s treatment of him. stated was “nearly in tears.” [Enclosure (14, 45)]

8. stated he believed the CO grabbed a portion of arm vice his collar. [Enclosure (45)]

9. told that the CO grabbed and pulled down on his collar to say something to him during the Mooring to a Buoy evolution. [Enclosure (19)]

10. Captain Defant recalled grabbing on his arm in an effort to re-focus his attention. [Enclosure (51)]

11. Seven of the Officers and Chiefs interviewed have heard or are aware of the mooring to a buoy incident in which the CO grabbed uniform on the bridge. [Enclosure (14, 16, 19, 21, 23, 34, 38)]

Hitting/Touching of (UNREP, Early 2023)

12. Around January/February 2023 during an underway replenishment evolution with USNS HENRY J KAISER, was standing watch as the Conning Officer on the port bridge wing and was standing watch as the Officer of the Deck (OOD). At one point during the evolution, gave an incorrect conning order with the CO standing nearby. In response, the CO lightly struck on his shoulder with her opened palm, ostensibly to get him to re-focus his attention. [Enclosure (14, 18)]

13. Captain Defant confirmed that she lightly struck in his arm/shoulder area to re-focus his attention after he gave an incorrect order. [Enclosure (51)]

14. approached his new Department Head, about this incident, which took place prior to arrival onboard LAKE ERIE. stated that he struggled with how to advise on what to do about the CO hitting him due to the fact that the incident involved the CO. [Enclosure (34)]

Hitting/Touching of (Other Evolutions)

15. recalled observing an incident in or around December 2022 on the bridge in which the CO inappropriately touched stated she was standing on the bridge wing as the Conning Officer and she observed the CO grab collar, ostensibly to re-position him away from either the Junior Officer of the Deck (JOOD) table or the Voyage Management System (VMS) workstation. stated that she did not bring the incident up to anyone until she transferred into a different department on the ship and started working for in Engineering Department. I was unable to determine whether
this incident was the same as the above Mooring to a Buoy incident with misremembered dates and facts, or a separate touching. [Enclosure (21)]

16. Captain Defant did not recall the above additional incident. [Enclosure (51)]

17. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) recalled observing a separate incident when (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) was Conning Officer and (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) was helm safety under instruction. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) could not hear the order repeat-back by the helm safety, and the CO smacked (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) with the back of her hand, ostensibly to re-focus (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) attention. I was unable to determine whether this incident was the same as the above UNREP incident with misremembered dates and facts, or a separate touching. [Enclosure (21)]

18. Captain Defant did not recall above additional incident. [Enclosure (51)]

19. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) recalled an incident he believed was during a debrief (NFI) during which the CO acknowledged accidentally hitting someone, ostensibly to get the Officer’s attention. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) believes the Officer who had been hit was (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) while conning the ship. [Enclosure (10)]

20. In mid-August 2023, (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) approached her Department Head, (b) (6), (b) (7)(C), with concerns about an incident in which the CO had inappropriately put her hands on (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) that (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) had witnessed. I was unable to positively associate this incident with any of the above specific instances of touching. [Enclosure (32)]

Other Information Related to Hitting/Touching

21. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) stated while he stood watch as master helmsman, he has observed the CO “nudge people out of the way.” [Enclosure (24)]

Findings of Fact Involving the Commanding Officer Yelling or Berating

Contractor Sea Trials Pilot House De-Brief (Late 2022)

22. During LAKE ERIE’s underway for contractor sea trials in November 2022, the ship had to immediately return to the pier as a result of engineering casualties. [Enclosure (12, 42, 49, 50, 51)]

23. Immediately following the ship’s return to port, the CO held a post-evolution debrief in the pilot house with watchstanders plus external assessors and observers. During this debrief, several watchstanders and Officers attempted to provide observations and opinions in order to ascertain what transpired. The CO became extremely agitated and screamed at several people. [Enclosure (12, 32, 39, 42, 47, 50, 51)]

24. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) stated the CO yelled and insulted people during the debrief, including (b) (6), (b) (7)(C). [Enclosure (47)]
25. The CO “very loudly and very rudely” got up close to [b](b)(6),(b)(7)(C) face. [Enclosure (47)]

26. [b](b)(6),(b)(7)(C) felt that the CO was getting progressively agitated the more debrief points were brought up. [Enclosure (42)]

27. [b](b)(6),(b)(7)(C) observed the CO yelling at [b](b)(6),(b)(7)(C) in response to [b](b)(6),(b)(7)(C) debrief points. [b](b)(6),(b)(7)(C) believed [b](b)(6),(b)(7)(C) was bringing up valid points about steering issues observed, but that the CO did not want to hear it. [Enclosure (50)]

28. Approximately two minutes into the debrief, the CO stated “Get the fuck off the bridge. We’re done” or words to that effect and abruptly ended the debrief. [Enclosure (12, 42, 47, 49, 50)]

29. Captain Defant confirmed becoming agitated during the debrief and yelling upon being informed of the scope of the casualty and the fact there were last minute watchbill changes that were not brought to her attention. She recalled abruptly ending the debrief upon recognition of the breadth of the underway casualty and the need to initiate a Preliminary Investigation (PI). She further stated that continuing with the debrief would have been counter-productive. [Enclosure (51)]

30. [b](b)(6),(b)(7)(C) stated that senior leadership and subject matter experts (SME) remained on the bridge in an effort to ascertain causal factors. At some point, the CO directed [b](b)(6),(b)(7)(C) away from the group in a dismissive manner, while continuing to have a discussion with the [b](b)(6),(b)(7)(C) and the [b](b)(6),(b)(7)(C) regarding EOSS terminology. [Enclosure (42)]

31. [b](b)(6),(b)(7)(C), detached Nov 2022) felt the CO’s reaction during the debrief was excessive and unprofessional. [Enclosure (49)]

32. [b](b)(6),(b)(7)(C) felt the CO should not behave the way she did in front of junior sailors, and characterized the CO’s delivery as unprofessional. [Enclosure (39)]

33. [b](b)(6),(b)(7)(C) stated that following the debrief, many people came to his stateroom expressing concern about the CO’s behavior, and were looking for guidance on what to do. [Enclosure (47)]

34. [b](b)(6),(b)(7)(C) felt that the debrief on the bridge regarding the engineering casualty set the tone for the CO’s leadership style. [Enclosure (42)]

**Contractor Sea Trials Meeting with Department Heads (Late 2022)**

35. Approximately 1-2 hours following the debrief in the pilot house, the CO met with the Department Heads and the [b](b)(6),(b)(7)(C) in the wardroom to further discuss the events surrounding the engineering casualties and how the watch teams performed. The CO “…expressed her supreme displeasure with how that had gone…” [the debrief earlier same day] and that it was not acceptable. [Enclosure (42, 47, 50)]
36. The CO dismissed all LT Department Heads and said to [b)(6), [b)(7)(C)] and [b)(6), [b)(7)(C)] with the XO present, “I run the ship, and he [XO] runs the ship with me, you don't run the ship.” She further said that [b)(6), [b)(7)(C)] intended to continue in the Navy they had better learn that lesson. [Enclosure (42, 47)]

37. [b)(6), [b)(7)(C)] stated that, going forward, the CO would always “shut down” [b)(6), [b)(7)(C)] and [b)(6), [b)(7)(C)] any time they brought up issues or asked questions in a public forum. [Enclosure (42)]

Security Alert Incident (Late 2022)

38. Around the November 2022 timeframe, the CO discovered a weapons office door to Radar 1 open and unattended, leading to a security alert. While in Radar 1, the CO discovered an inappropriate drawing on a whiteboard depicting a female body. The CO called [b)(6), [b)(7)(C)] to her at-sea cabin and reprimanded him about being better about monitoring his spaces loud enough that “ears were ringing.” [b)(6), [b)(7)(C)] then returned to the Radar 1 space to finish dealing with the unsecured space [b)(6), [b)(7)(C)] also ensured the drawing was erased. [Enclosure (46, 50)]

39. Captain Defant recalled the security alert incident, and stated she admonished Weapons Department leadership along with CM & CF Divisions in the helicopter hangar, and admonished Weapons Department leadership in Radar 1, but did not recall a separate instance where she admonished any Weapons Department leadership in her at-sea cabin. [Enclosure (51)]

40. Approximately 5-10 minutes after the CO dismissed [b)(6), [b)(7)(C)] from her cabin, the CO returned to Radar 1 with [b)(6), [b)(7)(C)] present. Upon entering the space, the CO looked at the whiteboard where the drawing had been erased, and started yelling at [b)(6), [b)(7)(C)] saying “Do you think that makes everything better because you erased the drawing? Do you think that you’re a good Department Head now?” While the CO was reprimanding [b)(6), [b)(7)(C)] she elevated the tone of her voice to a “higher, bullying-like, mocking way” according to [b)(6), [b)(7)(C)] [Enclosure (46)]

41. [b)(6), [b)(7)(C)] felt the CO’s public delivery of her reprimand in Radar 1 was unprofessional. [Enclosure (46)]

AVCERT Meeting (Mid 2023)

42. In the early August 2023 timeframe, [b)(6), [b)(7)(C)] Officer) briefed an aviation certification (AVCERT) meeting in the wardroom to update the CO on the ship’s aviation material readiness. The CO, XO, Operations Officer, Chief Engineer, Combat Systems Officer, Operations Officer, Electronics Material Officer, Electrical Officer, and Damage Control Assistant attended. [Enclosure (9, 10, 11, 26, 28, 32, 35, 37, 40, 45, 51)]

43. During this meeting, the CO became agitated, approached the laptop containing the brief/spreadsheet, and began making updates to the presentation herself. Following a brief exchange between [b)(6), [b)(7)(C)] and the CO, the CO abruptly cleared everyone out of the
Subj:  COMMAND INVESTIGATION INTO COMPLAINTS OF TOXIC COMMAND CLIMATE AND SEX DISCRIMINATION ABOARD USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70)

wardroom with the exception of the XO and [Enclosure (9, 10, 11, 23, 26, 28, 32, 40, 45)] The CO then screamed at [Enclosure (9, 10, 11, 23, 26, 28, 32, 40, 45)]

44. The CO stated to [Enclosure (9, 10, 11, 23, 26, 28, 32, 40, 45)] “…when I say I’m tired of this problem, I’m really saying I’m tired of you…” or words to that effect. [Enclosure (11, 45)]

45. [Enclosure (9, 10, 11, 23, 26, 28, 32, 40, 45)] was in tears following the CO’s reprimand. [Enclosure (9, 11, 45)]

46. Six people reported hearing the CO screaming at [Enclosure (9, 10, 11, 23, 26, 28, 32, 40, 45)] from several spaces away, throughout Officers’ Country. Several Officers also reported trying to keep people away or shield them from hearing the CO’s reprimands. [Enclosure (9, 12, 23, 26, 28, 32)]

47. [Enclosure (9, 10, 11, 23, 26, 28, 32, 40, 45)] stated he “…never saw Department Heads leave the wardroom so quickly…” following the CO’s direction to clear the wardroom, and felt the CO’s response and delivery was unwarranted. [Enclosure (26)]

48. Captain Defant confirmed she yelled at [Enclosure (9, 10, 11, 23, 26, 28, 32, 40, 45)] during the meeting, and stated the purpose of the yelling was because she had told [Enclosure (9, 10, 11, 23, 26, 28, 32, 40, 45)] to do something four consecutive times and the task was not completed. [Enclosure (51)]

49. Four khaki leaders aware of the CO’s reprimand after the fact thought the CO’s delivery was excessive and unprofessional. [Enclosure (9, 10, 32, 38, 45)]

CMAV Production Meeting – Yelling at a Civilian (Mid 2023)

50. In early August 2023, at a weekly CMAV production [maintenance] meeting the CO asked the Temporary Port Engineer (TPE) representative, a civilian, about an email regarding a maintenance issue from the prior day which had accused the ship of a tagout violation. The TPE responded that he did not recall the e-mail in question, at which time the CO told the TPE “…Get your things. Let's go” and escorted the TPE off the ship. While at the end of the brow, the CO yelled at the TPE and told the TPE never to come back to the ship. [Enclosure (45, 51)]

51. Captain Defant stated that during the CMAV meeting she asked the TPE a question about the e-mail and upon receiving an unsatisfactory answer, she immediately escorted him off the ship and forbid the TPE’s re-entry onboard. She further stated that while speaking to the TPE at the end of the brow, she spoke sternly but calmly to the TPE. [Enclosure (51)]

52. [Enclosure (9, 10, 11, 23, 26, 28, 32, 40, 45)] felt the CO’s actions were warranted but excessive and likely unprofessional. [Enclosure (45)]

Instances of Yelling As Recalled by the XO or CMC

CO’s First Address to Chiefs’ Mess and Wardroom (Late 2022)

53. The CO’s first combined address to the wardroom and Chiefs’ mess after assuming command occurred following one of the ship’s first underway periods in 2022. [Enclosure (9, 10, 11, 23, 26, 28, 32, 40, 45)]
Subj: COMMAND INVESTIGATION INTO COMPLAINTS OF TOXIC COMMAND CLIMATE AND SEX DISCRIMINATION ABOARD USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70)

stated the CO “…came in hot…she was screaming…she was yelling what her expectations were to the team” and that “The whole team was in shock.” [Enclosure (48)]

felt that in this instance, the CO had just lost the wardroom and the Chiefs’ mess, that the team would not approach the CO on issues after this meeting, and that if he ever addressed his team like the CO just did, he would have been investigated. [Enclosure (48)]

and discussed a plan to address the CO’s behavior with the CO the next morning, but were in fear of the CO’s reaction. [Enclosure (48)]

The next morning following the CO’s address in the wardroom, pulled into the CMC’s office, closed the door, and in a distressed manner, said “What the hell are we going to do? How are we going to function this way?” with regard to the CO’s behavior. [Enclosure (47)]

Life Vest Maintenance

On an unknown date, the CO tasked with conducting maintenance on a single Mark I Life Vest she provided to acknowledged the task, but later realized that the Mark 1 life vests were in an Inactive Equipment Maintenance (IEM) status. When informed the CO of the IEM status, the CO brought to see the Executive Officer in the XO’s stateroom, and yelled for not being aware that the life vests were in an IEM status, then kicked her out of the XO’s stateroom. The XO was present for this berating. [Enclosure (49, 50)]

recalled the CO was “red-faced screaming at” and that Captain Defant did not give a chance to talk or explain. characterized the CO’s yelling as excessive and unprofessional. [Enclosure (50)]

After this event, considered filing an Inspector General (IG) complaint against the CO based on perceived unfair treatment, but decided against filing a complaint due to the close proximity of her planned detachment from the command. briefed the CO on consideration of filing an IG complaint. [Enclosure (49, 50)]

Other Instances Observed by the XO or CMC

In July/August 2022, watchstanders and Afloat Training Group representatives were present in the wardroom for a sea and anchor brief. Upon entering the wardroom, the CO began screaming about air conditioning boundaries not being enforced. felt the CO’s actions were unprofessional. [Enclosure (48)]

recalled an incident in the CO’s at-sea cabin around the January/February 2023 timeframe when briefed the CO on a weapons’ related issue (NFI) and the CO was displeased with the report. In response, the CO reprimanded by “Yelling at the top of her
lungs” to a point where assumed a parade rest position, ostensibly due to the intensity and volume of the CO’s reprimand stated it was an uncomfortable situation and that the CO’s delivery was excessive. [Enclosure (45)]

62. Following a Department Head meeting with the CO, observed the CO “Yell at the top of her lungs” at but could not recall the purpose of the yelling. felt the CO’s delivery was excessive, unwarranted, and unprofessional. [Enclosure (48)]

63. recalled an incident following a wardroom training event when Captain Defiant took aside and screamed at both of them, ostensibly to correct them for speaking over the CO, each other, and the brief for the training. felt the response was excessive and borderline unprofessional. [Enclosure (50)]

64. During a navigation brief in the wardroom, an Officer’s cellphone rang audibly. Captain Defiant stared at the Officer for several seconds and then yelled “Get out!” [Enclosure (28, 39, 45)]

65. felt the CO’s delivery during the cellphone incident was unprofessional. [Enclosures (28)]

66. Prior to the end of a meeting in the wardroom, and attempted to enter the wardroom for a scheduled meeting. The CO yelled “Get out!” [Enclosure (28, 45)]

67. felt the CO’s reaction to entry was warranted but excessive and unprofessional. [Enclosure (45)]

68. recalled briefing the CO during a Department Head meeting between October and December 2022 about an issue with the ship’s Personnel Conventional Ammunition and Explosives Handling Qualification and Certification Program (Qual/Cert) briefed the CO that one of the sailors had “fallen through the cracks” and their qualification periodicity was about to expire. After the meeting, all Department Heads were dismissed with exception of and The CO screamed at for 5-10 minutes, saying she “…did not fuck around with the ordnance…”, or words to that effect, and that needed to make sure that it was perfect beforehand. [Enclosure (46)]

69. ) recalled the same meeting, and added he observed Captain Defiant screaming in front of all of the Department Heads prior to speaking to just after the meeting, which he characterized as excessive and unprofessional. [Enclosure (50)]

70. recalled the same meeting, and that he could hear the CO yelling at several spaces away in Officers’ Country. tried to keep people away from the wardroom and nearby Officer’s Spaces to shield people from hearing the CO. [Enclosure (32)]
Subj: COMMAND INVESTIGATION INTO COMPLAINTS OF TOXIC COMMAND CLIMATE AND SEX DISCRIMINATION ABOARD USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70)

71. While conducting a live-fire event in the February/March 2023 onboard LAKE ERIE involving the Mark 38 Machine Gun System, the wrong Mark 38 mount was fired during the PACFIRE event. [Enclosure (45, 46, 51)] discussed the incident with the CO and XO in the CO’s at-sea cabin, during which the CO screamed at [Enclosure (45, 46, 51)]. [Enclosure (45, 46, 51)]

72. After exited the CO’s cabin and with just the CO and XO present, the CO threw a small flashlight towards her cabin door. [Enclosure (45, 51)]

Instances of Yelling as Recalled by Department Heads

73. During contractor sea trials around July/August 2022, the CO screamed at and slammed the door to the XO’s stateroom while discussing concerns about the ship’s flight deck certification. recalled the screaming was loud enough that he could hear the CO from his stateroom several doors down the passageway. [Enclosure (42, 49)]

74. The CO tasked to find a replacement fire extinguisher for one of the ship’s RHIBs. Approximately 1.5 hours later, the CO found in the wardroom and began screaming at stating “Didn’t I tell you to find something?” [Enclosure (49)]

75. Other Officers recalled that Captain Defant would frequently yell at and , and that she was quick to shut them down. [Enclosure (12, 49)]

76. stated CO yelling “…is not a rare occurrence.” [Enclosure (37)]

77. has observed the CO frequently lose her temper, yell at someone, and/or slap her hands on a table with such force that people jump in response. He further stated that every time someone screws up, the CO yells. [Enclosure (43)]

78. Following a Weapons Department Captain’s mast, the CO berated , stating that they were useless and that they were driving the Department into the ground. recalled the CO yelling ‘…that we were fucking up our Department and we were fucking up her ship. And that we were this close to just getting fired, both of us, and that we were putting Sailors’ lives in danger because of our incompetence’. [Enclosure (46)]

79. In August or September 2022, observed the CO ask a question. attempted to answer the CO’s question by first explaining the situation, to which the CO responded she didn’t need his “mansplaining.” [Enclosure (42)]

Instances of Yelling As Recalled by Junior Officers

80. stated the CO yells a lot. [Enclosure (31)]
81. stated the CO tends to get noticeably angry and that he is uncomfortable with the CO yelling on the bridge to correct watchstanders. [Enclosure (8)]

82. stated that he has been yelled at by the CO and that at times the tension at the command can be excessive. [Enclosure (10)]

83. stated several Officers are afraid of the CO, that she often hears the CO yelling, and that she has been yelled and cursed at personally by the CO. She does not feel comfortable talking to the CO. [Enclosure (52)]

84. stated that over the last two months (July/August ‘23), things have gotten worse at the command. She had heard bouts of yelling by the CO in the XO’s stateroom just walking by and stated “…it’s like walking on eggshells” at the command. [Enclosure (12)]

85. Five other Officers stated the CO yells. [Enclosure (9, 13, 19, 22, 23)]

86. In early August 2023 during an S-2 Division in the Spotlight (DITS) out brief, the CO yelled at because electrical safety discrepancies had not been resolved. Her Department Head, felt the CO’s delivery was excessive and unprofessional. [Enclosure (43)]

87. Captain Defant stated she did not recall any instances where she yelled at a Division in the Spotlight brief. [Enclosure (51)]

88. while on the bridge, pointed out dolphins. The CO approached and began yelling at him to re-focus his attention. [Enclosure (14, 17, 25)]

89. was bothered by this incident and “wasn't doing very good for the next few weeks.” [Enclosure (17)]

90. did not agree with the public nature of the CO’s reprimand of [Enclosure (25)]

91. has heard getting yelled at by the CO in the CO’s at-sea cabin. [Enclosure (17)]

92. stated that when he walks by the CO’s at-sea cabin or the XO’s stateroom, he often hears the CO yelling at someone in either of the two spaces, and that in some instances, the CO’s explanations and verbal reprimands can be excessive. [Enclosure (23)]

93. stated that there used to be a running joke about Department Heads getting annihilated through walls and that you can clearly hear the CO yelling. [Enclosure (17)]

94. stated the CO can often be heard in the XO’s stateroom shouting, which can be heard from several spaces away. [Enclosure (11)]

95. has heard the CO on the ship’s internal handheld radios “blasting someone for not doing something or doing it incorrectly” in a public, humiliating fashion. [Enclosure (19)]
96. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) recalled an incident when (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) was late getting a SIPR laptop in support of Officer training. The CO “publicly blasted him,” and made an example of him. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) further stated she felt in this instance that the CO’s behavior bordered on bullying. [Enclosure (19)]

Instances of Yelling As Recalled by Chiefs

97. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) witnessed the CO reduce (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) to tears by yelling. [Enclosure (40)]

98. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) stated the CO screams at people over the ship’s internal handheld radios. [Enclosure (40)]

99. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) stated the CO yells at least once a week and is sometimes unprofessional when speaking on the ship’s internal handheld radios. [Enclosure (35)]

Command Climate – Commanding Officer’s Approachability

Triad Concerns with CO Approachability

100. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) stated he sometimes has reservations bringing bad news to the CO due to “the pain of dealing with the CO’s over the top responses.” (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) stated the CO is approachable by the crew, less so by Junior Officers, and even less so by Department Heads. [Enclosure (45)]

101. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) stated the CO’s typical reactions to adverse incidents or normal churn such as people showing up late to meetings or cellphones going off tend to be unwarranted, excessive, and unprofessional. [Enclosure (45)]

102. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) stated he had several conversations with LAKE ERIE khaki leadership seeking his advice on how to relay information to the CO. He also stated the XO is relied upon heavily to relay information to the CO. He further stated there was a fear among the Department Heads of approaching the CO. [Enclosure (48)]

103. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) stated he did not feel comfortable bringing bad news to the CO, and in many instances, he waited to brief the CO on issues that he typically would brief a CO immediately on. [Enclosure (48)]

104. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) felt that if one makes a mistake with the CO, it is not redeemable. [Enclosure (28)]

105. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) stated that (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) confided to him that the CO told (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) that she did not care what his (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) opinion was. (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) further recalled (b) (6), (b) (7)(C) stated he had never dealt with that type of issue before. [Enclosure (49)]
Subj: COMMAND INVESTIGATION INTO COMPLAINTS OF TOXIC COMMAND CLIMATE AND SEX DISCRIMINATION ABOARD USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70)

106. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) did not feel valued by or feel comfortable around the CO, and felt the CO was dismissive of him. [Enclosure (48)]

107. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) stated the CO and (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) did not get along. [Enclosure (12)]

108. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) believed there was tension between the CO and (b)(6), (b)(7)(C). [Enclosure (32)]

109. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) stated that on one occasion he briefed the CO about the death of a family member (either grandparent or uncle) of one of LAKE ERIE’s sailors and subsequent leave recommendation for the sailor. After receiving the brief, the CO responded “Why is that my problem?” or words to that effect. [Enclosure (48)]

Khaki Concerns with CO Approachability

110. As Department Heads, (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) stated they did not feel comfortable bringing bad news to the CO. [Enclosure (42, 46, 47, 49)]

111. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) stated he would not want to go to war with the CO because you never knew what you would get with the CO. [Enclosure (47)]

112. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) prefers to take bad news to the XO rather than the CO. He further stated he feels a lot of people do not speak up about problems during debriefs with the CO present, and that debriefs tend to be more “open” when the CO is not present. He feels there is an “eggshell culture” onboard LAKE ERIE. [Enclosure (42)]

113. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) stated there is an apprehension to bring up issues as a Department Head to the CO. [Enclosure (34)]

114. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) stated the CO is often not approachable. [Enclosure (11)]

115. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) does not feel comfortable around the CO, and feels a lot of people are uncomfortable speaking out, specifically at khaki meetings in front of the CO. [Enclosure (14)]

116. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) stated several Officers and Chiefs avoid the CO and are afraid of her. He further stated he felt the CO was not approachable. [Enclosure (41)]

117. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) stated “I don't think there’s a person onboard that enjoys any interaction with the Captain. Everybody is on eggshells.” He further stated the CO’s leadership style is abrasive and results in Officers shutting down. [Enclosure (40)]

118. In June 2023, the CO held Captain’s mast on an S-2 division Sailor. Following the mast, the CO presented pre-filled out counseling sheets to (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) and the (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) and stated words to
the effect of if she sees the masted sailor again at mast, that [b][6], [b][7][C] would be standing in whites alongside the sailor. [Enclosure (41, 45, 51, 52)]

119. [b][6], [b][7][C] stated that she and [b][6], [b][7][C] fear further reprimanding their sailors based on the CO’s comments. [Enclosure (52)]

120. [b][6], [b][7][C] felt the CO’s reaction at the Captain’s mast for the S-2 Sailor was warranted and professional, but excessive due to the public nature of the delivery. [Enclosure (45)]

121. [b][6], [b][7][C] stated that the CO is approachable, because “it's easy to get yelled at, and five minutes later you can go talk to her…no issues.” [b][6], [b][7][C] is comfortable bringing bad news to the CO. [Enclosure (43)]

122. [b][6], [b][7][C] stated she does not look forward to meetings with the CO, and feels that the CO is not approachable. [Enclosure (52)]

123. [b][6], [b][7][C] is afraid to talk to the CO. [Enclosure (43)]

**Officer Retention**

124. [b][6], [b][7][C] stated the CO has de-motivated him and that because of her, he does not want to continue his service in the Navy. [Enclosure (46)]

125. [b][6], [b][7][C] stated a big part of her decision to retire was based on her interactions with the CO, that she has never before been at a command where she has been mistreated as she had been onboard LAKE ERIE, and that she never wants to work for a person like Captain Defant again. [Enclosure (49)]

126. [b][6], [b][7][C] stated she came into the Navy excited about being a SWO Department Head, but that after her tour onboard LAKE ERIE, she has no desire to be a SWO Department Head. [Enclosure (21)]

**General Crew Impressions of the CO’s Communication Style**

127. [b][6], [b][7][C] stated the CO tended to “ratchet up quickly,” often yelled at Department Heads, and that once someone is on the CO’s bad side, it is hard to recover. He further stated the CO’s reactions tended to be excessive and unprofessional, and that the CO typically would not take into account who was in the room [during reprimands]. He further stated the CO would commonly reprimand in public, and would come down hard on Department Heads, usually in a public manner. [b][6], [b][7][C] also stated the Department Heads inquired to him why the CO was always yelling. [Enclosure (50)]

128. [b][6], [b][7][C] stated that in general, the CO did not display inappropriate behavior in front of the crew; however, the CO displayed inappropriate behavior primarily in front of khaki leadership. [Enclosure (48)]
129. [Enclosure (7)] stated the CO’s delivery can be rough and that she could work on tact.

130. [Enclosure (38)] stated he felt the CO’s responses to Officers in general were not normal, tended to be unprofessional, and that the CO’s behavior has become normalized onboard. [Enclosure (38)] has observed the CO make rude comments during Department Head and Department LCPO meetings that are “…not the stuff he expects to come from a CO.” He further recalled hearing the CO say in some conversations “I don’t fucking care” or “Are you fucking kidding me?”

131. [Enclosure (43)] stated he approached him about the CO’s temper and how frequently the CO is angry.

132. The CO curses a lot and uses the “F-word” frequently. [Enclosure (30, 46, 51)]

133. [Enclosure (25)] stated the CO’s tone at times can border verbal abuse, and that often at times the CO can be aggressive.

134. [Enclosure (33)] has observed harsh language and harsh attitudes onboard LAKE ERIE. He further stated that the CO’s reactions to certain situations are explosive and that “…a switch can flip like that…go from 0-100 in a split second.” He also stated that “…it contributes to a feeling of everyone on edge.”

135. [Enclosure (46)] stated the CO would typically slam a mug, or a book, or a pen, etc., against the table following the receipt of bad news and that he eventually became de-sensitized to the CO’s angry behavior.

136. [Enclosure (44)] witnessed exchanges between the CO and other Officers in which the Officers were shocked at the public nature of the course correction provided by the CO.

137. [Enclosure (10)] stated that there were big differences between the current and previous COs, and that the current CO was more aggressive, sometimes crosses the line, and is unprofessional.

138. [Enclosure (48)] stated the CPO mess felt the CO was unstable.

139. [Enclosure (17)] stated he felt there was unevenness at the command, in that some people do not get yelled at when they “screw up” the same way that others do.

Crew Opinions on Command Toxicity

140. [Enclosure (50)] stated that upon his detachment from LAKE ERIE in December 2022, five months after the CO assumed command, he did not feel the command climate was completely toxic, but he stated he felt that if things continued, it was headed in that direction.
Subj: COMMAND INVESTIGATION INTO COMPLAINTS OF TOXIC COMMAND CLIMATE AND SEX DISCRIMINATION ABOARD USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70)

141. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) felt the command had a toxic environment. [Enclosure (48)]

142. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) further stated he felt he was on pins and needles around the CO and that toxic leadership comes out of the CO when she deems someone untrustworthy. [Enclosure (48)]

143. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) felt when the CO was under stress or perceived someone to be untrustworthy, “toxic leadership comes out.” [Enclosure (47)]

144. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) stated the CO uses embarrassment and public shaming, and that the command is toxic. [Enclosure 52]

145. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) felt that the command is toxic, that it is not all due to leadership, and that ship’s schedule and material challenges are a contributor. [Enclosure (38)]

146. (b)(6), (b)(7) feels the command has toxic traits and that it is one of the more toxic commands she has been stationed at. [Enclosure (35)]

147. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) stated that compared to his previous ship, LAKE ERIE is toxic, primarily due to the CO’s temper. [Enclosure (43)]

148. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) felt she was being unfairly treated and that the command was a toxic environment. [Enclosures (49)]

149. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) stated that the command is toxic. [Enclosure (42)]

150. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) feels that the command is toxic. [Enclosure (39)]

151. The CO has sometimes stated “I’m not here for your morale…I don't care if morale is high… I'm here to get my job done” or words to that effect. [Enclosure (34)]

152. Captain Defant did not recall making any such statement about morale. [Enclosure (51)]

**Treatment of Certain Individuals**

153. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) felt that by September of 2022, the CO did not like (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) and treated him worse. [Enclosures (47)]

154. In May/June 2023, (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) was eating in the wardroom just prior to meal hours. The CO saw (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) eating, noted that it was prior to meal hours, and stated to (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) that she was not special, and that she did not deserve to have food at that time. [Enclosure (21)]

155. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) felt that (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) was like “a whipping boy” to the CO, in that he routinely has been the source of frustration of the CO. [Enclosure (32)]
Subj: COMMAND INVESTIGATION INTO COMPLAINTS OF TOXIC COMMAND CLIMATE AND SEX DISCRIMINATION ABOARD USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70)

156. stated tend to trigger stronger responses from the CO than other Officers, and feels the reactions by the CO to would not trigger the same CO reaction if someone else had committed the same wrong. [Enclosure (17)]

157. believed that people get “targets” on their backs and that they cannot do anything right in leadership’s eyes, and felt that had targets on them. [Enclosure (30)]

158. is an with over 20 years of service and was serving as the acting onboard LAKE ERIE while the Officer billet was gapped. [Enclosure (49)]

159. told she felt she was being discriminated against and being unfairly targeted by the CO. [Enclosure (46)]

160. felt that people who were gay received better treatment from the CO than those that were not. There was no other evidence in interviews of preferential treatment. [Enclosure (49)]

161. was treated “pretty rough” by the CO. [Enclosure (7)]

162. felt that early on the CO had it out for, and felt received worse treatment than others. [Enclosure (47)]

163. witnessed some instances where was in tears following an interaction with the CO. [Enclosure (48)]

164. felt the CO did not treat any differently than the rest of the Department Heads. [Enclosure (50)]

CO’s Statements Regarding Her Own Leadership Practices

165. In addition to the findings of act above, Captain Defant made the following statements:

   a. She has a loud voice that carries.
   b. She typically yells in instances when she has had to repeat herself multiple times.
   c. She received comments about yelling in her 2022 DEOCS survey ending in November 2022, but she did not change her leadership style, nor did she change the frequency of her yelling.
   d. Yelling is not her first course of action.
Subj: COMMAND INVESTIGATION INTO COMPLAINTS OF TOXIC COMMAND CLIMATE AND SEX DISCRIMINATION ABOARD USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70)

e. She does not recall a specific instance of yelling at an Officer to get out of the wardroom, but stated she probably has before.
f. She does not always follow the practice of praise in public, reprimand in private.
g. She uses profanity on a daily basis.
h. She has a temper.
i. Without recalling a specific circumstance, she has probably not always been professional.
j. Some of the crew has cried in front of her.
k. She is aware that people think she is mean.
l. Up until the date of this investigation, she has only issued two Letters of Instruction to Officers onboard LAKE ERIE, both were to (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) m. On her approachability, she stated:
   i. That mostly the crew is comfortable presenting bad news to her.
   ii. That some of the Chiefs are comfortable presenting bad news to her.
   iii. That some Junior Officers (JO) are not comfortable presenting bad news to her, and that some are afraid of her.
   iv. That JOs’ fear is as much on the JO as it is on the CO.
v. That Department Heads do bring her bad news.
   vi. That she does not know whether Department Heads are comfortable delivering bad news, because she cannot judge comfort.

[Enclosure (51)]

OPINIONS

Opinions on Sex Discrimination

1. This investigation did not reveal evidence that substantiates the allegation of sexual discrimination onboard LAKE ERIE. [FF (1) - (165)]

Opinions Related to Physical Touching

(b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

2. Although Captain Defant did not recall the incident, it is the Investigating Officer’s opinion that Captain Defant lightly smacked (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) while on watch on the bridge in order to refocus (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) attention after she failed to hear and subsequently acknowledge an order that was repeated-back to her as the Conning Officer. [FF (1-5)]

(b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

3. was seriously impacted emotionally and psychologically, as evidenced by her conversation with (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) after the incident. Although the “smack” did not hurt (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) the incident nearly triggered a “fight or flight” moment for (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) during a critical evolution underway. [FF (1-4)]

(b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

4. It is the Investigating Officer’s opinion that the CO’s purpose in touching (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) was to ensure she, as the Conning Officer, paid attention and responded to the helmsman’s repeat-back.
The touching was not an assault under Art. 128 of the UCMJ because the CO’s purpose was to draw attention. [FF (1-5)]

Mooring to a Buoy

5. Captain Defant acted excessively and unprofessionally when she walked over to grabbed and pulled on his uniform near his collar to pull him closer, and spoke into his ear to admonish for, according to Captain Defant, interrupting her while she was talking to the OOD in the pilot house. [FF (6-10)]

6. It is the Investigating Officer’s opinion that this behavior by Captain Defant was excessive and unnecessary. It is common for the Conning Officer or the Officer of the Deck to answer the type of question that was asked by the Captain. If Captain Defant’s intent was to clarify that her question was intended for the OOD vice the Conning Officer, a public statement in the pilot house clarifying her intent by the question would have been sufficient, more appropriate, and would have allowed for clarity for the full bridge team. Conveying her intent in private, in the manner that she did, was excessive, unnecessary, and leads to questionable intent by Captain Defant in this instance as to the purpose of her private admonishment. Because the touching exceeded that which could be needed to draw attention or for safety of or the ship, the touching was a Battery under Art. 128 of the UCMJ. [FF (6-10)]

UNREP

7. Captain Defant acted excessively and unprofessionally when she poked in the should to re-focus him after he issued an incorrect order to the helm during an UNREP. [FF (12-13)]

8. In the Investigating Officer’s opinion, a promptly issued verbal correction by the CO to the Conning Officer in this situation would have been more appropriate vice physically contacting, and may have also allowed the helm and helm safety watchstanders to potentially hear the CO’s voice and her associated order correction, which would enable the helm to take appropriate action to ensure the ship’s safety. Furthermore, physically contacting a Sailor in this instance is unnecessary, as there was no risk of immediate physical danger to However, her touching was not an assault under Art. 128 of the UCMJ because the CO’s purpose was to draw attention. [FF (12-13)]

CO’s Command Leadership Style with Respect to Volume, Yelling, and Profanity

9. Captain Defant is very blunt, has a loud voice even at a conversational level, and routinely uses profanity. Captain Defant is aware of these traits. [FF (23), (27-29), (68), (78), (83), (130), (132), (165)]

10. Captain Defant’s demonstrated leadership style onboard LAKE ERIE has consisted of frequent outbursts of yelling when she is displeased with a subordinate’s performance, deems someone untrustworthy, or feels she has to repeat herself often. [FF (23-28), (40), (48), (50), (53), (57-58), (60), (62–63), (65), (69), (74-86), (89-93), (95), (97), (124), (136), (141), (165)]
11. Captain Defant tends to admonish and/or reprimand subordinates, including Department Heads, in a public manner by yelling. [FF (20), (22-23), (26), (37), (39), (42), (45), (47-48), (50), (53), (57-58), (60-65), (68-72), (74), (76-77), (80-86), (88-99)]

12. Captain Defant’s outbursts have taken place both in public settings with multiple personnel present, and behind closed doors with typically just the Executive Officer in either the CO’s at-sea cabin or the Executive Officer’s stateroom and in some instances, an individual Officer facing the CO’s reprimand. However, the volume level of Captain Defant’s reprimands in closed door settings are clearly audible to others within close proximity of these spaces. [FF (20), (22-23), (26), (37), (39), (42), (45), (47-48), (50), (53), (57-58), (60-65), (68-72), (74), (76-77), (80-86), (88-99)]

13. Loud, blunt, and profane reprimands have persisted throughout the course of Captain Defant’s tenure onboard LAKE ERIE. [FF (20), (22-23), (26), (37), (39), (42), (45), (47-48), (50), (53), (57-58), (60-65), (68-72), (74), (76-77), (80-86), (88-99)]

14. Reprimanding in this manner is a toxic leader trait.

15. Captain Defant’s reactions and responses during adverse events or reports made to her, as captured in this investigation, are characterized as excessive and unprofessional. [FF (1), (6), (12), (20), (22-23), (26), (37), (39), (42), (45), (47-48), (50), (53), (57-58), (60-65), (68-72), (74), (76-77), (80-86), (88-99), (120), (127), (165)]

**Opinions on Bullying**

16. An officer, detailed to LAKE ERIE as the Executive Officer, was not specifically trained to perform the role of an Executive Officer despite serving as acting Executive Officer. [FF (57-59), (73-74), (125), (148), (158-164)]

17. On several occasions, Captain Defant delivered excessive reprimands to an Officer, and in at least one instance, brought said Officer to tears. [FF (57-59), (73-74), (125), (148), (158-164)]

18. Despite multiple reprimands, Captain Defant never issued any formal counseling (i.e., Letter of Instruction) documenting substandard performance. [FF (165)]

19. The excessive nature of CAPT Defant’s reprimands exceeded a reasonable standard for correcting professional deficiencies or providing constructive feedback to improve performance. In the opinion of the Investigating Officer, CAPT Defant’s actions exceeded any proper military purpose and were belittling and humiliating. As a result, CAPT Defant’s reprimands meet the definition of bullying in violation of OPNAVINST 5354.1H. [FF (57-59), (73-74), (125), (148), (158-164)]
Subj: COMMAND INVESTIGATION INTO COMPLAINTS OF TOXIC COMMAND CLIMATE AND SEX DISCRIMINATION ABOARD USS LAKE ERIE (CG 70)

20. draws the ire of Captain Defant, is singled out more than any other Officer, and triggers stronger responses from Captain Defant than others do. [FF (6), (12), (88), (96), (115), (155-157)]

21. In the Investigating Officer’s opinion, it is unlikely that a proper military purpose, such as safety of navigation or professional development/training, existed during the Mooring to a Buoy evolution that justified Captain Defant approaching, grabbing his uniform near the collar, and admonishing him for interrupting her while talking to the OOD. These actions were humiliating and degrading. As a result, CAPT Defant’s admonishment of meets the definition of bullying in violation of OPNAVINST 5354.1H. [FF (6-10)]

Opinions on Approachability and a Culture of Fear

22. Captain Defant’s behavior consisting of yelling, profanity, and public admonishments has contributed to a culture of fear onboard where a large number of Chiefs and Officers, to include triad members, are hesitant to or avoid bringing adverse reports to Captain Defant. [FF (100-123), (134-136), (165)]

23. Commands with a culture of fear run a higher risk of having a safety or operational mishap. A fear culture can facilitate an environment where Sailors lack questioning attitudes, and fear speaking up when something does not look right out of concern for the possible repercussions of speaking up and providing forceful backup. This culture ultimately leads to an unsafe command environment where Sailors do not feel empowered to take charge and exercise sound judgement in support of operational safety.

Opinions on Retention

24. Captain Defant’s recurring destructive behaviors as Commanding Officer have had a negative impact on Officer retention. A 20+ year Limited Duty Officer, a senior SWO Department Head, and a first tour SWO Division Officer want to end their Naval careers, citing their LAKE ERIE tour and/or Captain Defant’s leadership style as the reason or a contributing reason. [FF 121-123]]

25. LAKE ERIE’s wardroom consists of almost 50 Officers, many of whom are impressionable first and second term Junior Officers who are continuously observing and assessing the leadership traits of their Commanding Officer. It is logical to expect that a senior Commanding Officer and Warfare Commander demonstrating destructive behaviors can have a devastating impact on Sailor and Officer retention. [FF 124-126]

Opinions on Command Climate

26. There is clear evidence that Captain Defant’s recurrent, counterproductive behaviors have had adverse effects on subordinates and the command, and have had destructive effects on her crew. [FF 100-126]
27. A large percentage of the LAKE ERIE leadership perceives a toxic command climate onboard LAKE ERIE. [FF (1), (6), (11), (23), (140-150)]

28. Based on the principles and definitions stated in the preliminary statements regarding the characteristics of toxic command climates, it is the Investigating Officer’s opinion that Captain Defant’s leadership style and demonstrated behaviors have created a toxic command climate onboard LAKE ERIE.

**Responsibilities of the Commanding Officer**

29. Reference (c), Article 0802 states “The commanding officer…shall exercise leadership through personal example, moral responsibility, and judicious attention to the welfare of persons under their control or supervision. Such leadership shall be exercised in order to achieve a positive, dominant influence on the performance of persons in the Department of the Navy”. CAPT Defant’s leadership, in particular her use of loud and public reprimands, is a counterexample to proper leadership, is damaging to the welfare of her crew, and results in a negative influence on the performance of LAKE ERIE’s Sailors. Therefore, CAPT Defant’s leadership has not conformed with that required by Article 0802.

30. Reference (c), Article 0820 states “The commanding officer shall use all proper means to foster high morale, and to develop and strengthen the moral and spiritual well-being of the personnel under his or her command.” CAPT Defant’s use of loud and public reprimands decreases the morale of LAKE ERIE’s Sailors. Therefore, CAPT Defant’s leadership has not conformed with that required by Article 0820.