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Office of the Commanding General  
BG Justin P. Carlitti

VDF-CG

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MEMORANDUM FOR SEE DISTRIBUTION

Subject: VDF Command Policy 21-001, VDF Soldier Political Activities and Personal Communications

1. For nearly a year our Commonwealth and nation endured the most extreme political division and civil disturbances in the modern era. Fourteen months ago I published "Command Policy Letter 20-001, Political Activities by Members of the Virginia Defense Force" see VDF Policies) to advise our members of self-regulated restraints and laws pertaining to VDF members participating in political activities. This Policy amplifies that message to help all our members conform political activities and personal communication with good order, the law, and otherwise help our force protection posture through situational awareness. Many state and federal laws that touch on this subject. However, any VDF member who faithfully follows these ten "Bedrock Standards of Conduct," is unlikely to violate those laws or to tarnish the VDF's reputation.

2. Bedrock Standards of Conduct

a. **#1: Maintain a Wall Between Your Private Views and Your Role as a VDF Member.**

The guidance below pertains to your personal communications and actions. Understand you are a VDF Soldier 24/7. VDF members should be justifiably proud of their service and share that experience with their friends and neighbors. But remember for that reason they will look to you for community leadership and you should ensure your political views never become intertwined with discussing your service.

b. **#2: Maintain Discipline in the VDF Ranks.** VDF matters remain within the VDF, and outside matters – particularly political beliefs -- must remain outside your VDF life. VDF is not a forum for political discussions or in any way a political organization. Never use VDF .gov emails or equipment for partisan political discussions or purposes. Carefully police your own activities and coach your peers and subordinates to do so. Similarly, any issues, ideas or proposals you have which are VDF matters must be communicated via your chain of command. If a Soldier feels uncomfortable using the chain of command to address a problem, then s/he may contact the VDF Inspector General.

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c. **#3: Practice Force Protection and Operational Security 24/7.** Do share your VDF experience online and in person (and recruit!), but with an eye to Force Protection. In other words share the basics of what VDF does, but do not share operational information such as Force deployment locations, and active duty missions. When online or on social media you may show photos *of you* in uniform, but not tactical equipment or tactical activities.

d. **#4: Use Social Media Responsibly.** I will paraphrase The Adjutant General's guidance to all members of the Department of Military Affairs here (with my "Think again" emphasis). "When communicating via social media posts, text messages, email, online chats, instant messaging, or blogs, service members should always apply the **Think, Type, Think Again, Post** rule:

**Think** about the message being communicated and who could potentially view it.

**Type** a communication that is consistent with [Soldier] values.

[**Think again** about the message being communicated and who could potentially view it.]

**Post** only those messages that demonstrate dignity and respect for self and others

Unfortunately, not all VDF members will follow such a common sense approach. VDF members involved in more serious incidents of online misconduct such as incitement of violence, harassment, bullying, stalking, discrimination, or retaliation may be subject to disciplinary and/or other corrective action. Personnel experiencing or witnessing online misconduct should promptly report matters to their chain of command or to the VDF Inspector General at [ig@vdf.virginia.gov](mailto:ig@vdf.virginia.gov).

e. **#5: Participate in Political Activities Responsibly.** You have no restrictions on lawful political participation. But as just stated, maintain a wall between your personal political views and your VDF membership. Additionally please temper your comments. Set the example by communicating your sincerely-held beliefs in reasonable language, which respects differences of opinion. Our civic duty includes doing our part to "turn the temperature down" on personal and public discussions.

f. **#6: Follow the Law.** By virtue of serving our country and Commonwealth, the public properly hold each of us to a high standard of conduct. Failure to satisfy moral and legal obligations reflects badly on our families and the VDF. Especially beware of the wrong-headed belief that if we strongly oppose certain political leaders' beliefs, we need not follow laws we think they wrongly passed. We may seek political change and participate in court cases challenging laws, but we must follow the laws at all times until and if they are repealed.

g. **#7: Think Twice About Attending Demonstrations.** You have the right to attend partisan and non-partisan demonstrations strictly in your private role. However, use good sense and avoid attending if those activities are likely to break down into civil disturbance or are likely to attract attackers. If you do attend, and attacks begin or tempers flare, you should leave. Crowd dynamics are such that even peace makers become victims so, again, leave if trouble even threatens to develop.

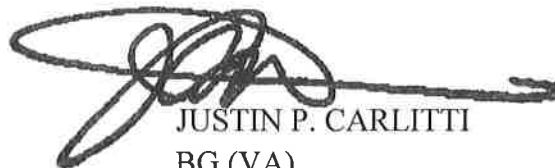
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h. **#8: Avoid Areas of Civil Disturbance.** Civil disturbance areas are not tourist events. Avoid such areas – even when news and other information sources indicate they are temporarily quiet. Many people were injured last year when simply being in the general area of civil disturbances. Once violence begins, rioters will randomly strike out at people passing by on foot or in vehicles. If a disturbance comes to you -- such as demonstrators entering a restaurant you are in -- leave immediately (and pay your bill online or by telephone if you cannot safely do so on the spot).

i. **#9: Do Not Speak for VDF Unless Specifically Authorized.** VDF members who are politically active or civic leaders may wish to promote the VDF through resolutions, legislation, and similar measures. In all such cases your efforts should be coordinated with the VDF Public Information Officer, who in turn coordinates messaging with the Department of Military Affairs and me. Again, you have a right to political and civic participation, but you do not have a right to independently speak for the VDF.

j. **#10: Public Service Is A Public Trust.** We should all affirm the special trust the American people have reposed in us, and the honor we have in serving, by always maintaining the highest standards of conduct and behavior. In this sense not only follow the guidance above, but avoid even the appearance of a impropriety that may arise when circumstances would cause a reasonable person with knowledge of the relevant facts to question a member's judgement and loyalty to our constitution. If a proposed action bothers your conscience -- even when it seems legal -- follow your conscience. If in doubt, ask your leaders. In sum, avoid any action that may bring you or the VDF into disrepute, even though the action is facially legal.



JUSTIN P. CARLITTI  
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