

Subj: COMMAND INVESTIGATION INTO THE DEATH OF AEAN BRANDON P.
CASERTA

1. Brandon Caserta dropped on request from Special Warfare training after suffering a broken tibia on or about July/August 2016. He selected Aviation Electricians Mate as his rate, and proceeded on TAD orders from Coronado, CA to Norfolk, VA. [Encl (3)]
2. AEAN Caserta arrived at Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron TWO EIGHT in February of 2017 after attending "A" & "C" Schools. He was assigned to the Auxiliary Resale Outlet (ARO) for 5 months before being assigned to 310 Work Center (WC) in June of 2017. [Encls (3), (11), (13)]
3. AEAN Caserta befriended [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] during his time in the ARO. They texted and corresponded via email and saw each other socially a handful of times outside of work. [Encls (10), (11)]
4. On or about May 2017, [REDACTED] while in the ARO, noticed AEAN Caserta was not himself and seemed depressed. He took him to the Wing Chaplain and ensured he was seen professionally; he had taken sailors to seek counseling previously and made sure to check on Caserta frequently in the future. [Encl (5)]
5. [REDACTED] was Caserta's Leading Petty Officer (LPO) in the 310 WC when he was assigned there after the ARO on or about June/July 2017. [REDACTED] was promoted to Detachment 4 LPO shortly after Caserta arrived in 310 WC on or about August 2017, but [REDACTED] stated that Caserta was a hard worker and always volunteered to help whenever it was needed. [Encls (4), (6), (13)]
6. [REDACTED] the Leading Chief Petty Officer of 310 WC, observed that AEAN Caserta to be a happy-go-lucky individual with good military bearing and professionalism. She also agreed that AEAN Caserta was often the first to volunteer for cleaning duties, aircraft wash, or field day but did not demonstrate initiative in completing his qualifications. [Encl (7)]
7. [REDACTED] who was also assigned to 310 WC on or about October 2017, invited Caserta to accompany him to his place of worship. AEAN Caserta attended worship ceremonies a few times. [REDACTED] also stated that Caserta had a great deal of animosity toward the Navy and the squadron and hoped that a religious experience would help him deal with his emotions. [Encl (12)]
8. AEAN Caserta did not like being in his current rate, and sought to redesignate to Aircrewman (AWF/R/S). [REDACTED] assisted in securing orders to rescue swimmer school and Avionics Warfare Sensor Operator School to begin in November 2017. However, Caserta was involved in a bicycle accident the week prior to executing those orders, and he broke his collar bone and was not physically qualified (NPQ) to begin training. [Encls (3), (5), (9), (10), (11), (12)]
9. [REDACTED] witnessed AEAN Caserta's bicycle accident in November of 2017, and assisted him in getting medical attention. After this incident they became friends and texted and emailed regularly. They met socially a handful of times outside of work as well, usually with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] [Encls (3), (9), (10), (11)].

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10. AEAN Caserta was reassigned to the ARO after his bicycle accident for the duration of his convalescence and/or limited duty from November 2017 – March 2018. During that time, his progress on his Plane Captain (PC) and Work Center Supervisor qualifications reset due to no progress/inactivity in accordance with the Naval Aviation Maintenance Program Instruction 4790. [Encls (3), (4), (5), (6), (7), (9), (10), (11)]

11. AEAN Caserta voiced his dissatisfaction with the squadron, the Navy, and his LPO [REDACTED] routinely during his correspondence with others from the squadron both verbally and electronically. Such statements were mainly made to [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] [Encls (5), (6), (9), (10), (11), (12)]

12. None of AEAN Caserta's peers thought to recommend he seek counselling and/or therapy about his feelings. His LPO [REDACTED] and Command Career Counselor [REDACTED] were also aware he did not like his current rate and wanted to redesignate. [Encls (5), (6), (8), (10), (11), (12)]

13. [REDACTED] was reassigned to 310 WC LPO from Detachment 4 in January of 2018. This was a demotion following two Reports of Counseling about his leadership methods being brash and abrasive. The first counseling occurred 22 November 2017, and the second counseling occurred 18 January 2018. [Encls (4), (6), (7), (8), (16)]

14. [REDACTED] was ordered to complete Anger Management and placed under a new Chief Petty Officer [REDACTED] as a leadership challenge. [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED] all frequented the 310 WC, engaged the sailors, and attempted to ensure they had a means to convey any concerns if things weren't working out with [REDACTED] as the LPO. [Encls (4), (6), (7), (8), (16)]

15. [REDACTED] counseled AEAN Caserta on his delinquent qualifications on 18 May 2018. Caserta was receptive and understood he needed to do better. 15 June 2018 was the suspense date for his PC Board and qualification. He went on leave for two weeks immediately following this counseling, from 18 May 2018 to 4 June 2018. [Encls (3), (6), (7), (14)]

16. AEAN Caserta did not complete his Personnel Qualification Syllabus (PQS) for the PC qualification and there was no board held on 15 June 2018. [REDACTED] further counselled Caserta on 18 June 2018 and awarded Extra Military Instruction (EMI) until he passed his mock PC board and was syllabus complete. [Encls (4), (6), (7), (14)]

17. AEAN Caserta requested to go to medical on 18 June 2018 to complete several labs and/or tests for his Aircrewman package renewal. Caserta had not previously let his LPO [REDACTED] know that he had any upcoming appointments. [REDACTED] questioned him about the nature of the procedures and told him he could not spare the manpower. Due to Caserta not having a car, Portsmouth Naval Hospital being 45-minute drive, and being unable to use the duty driver that day it would leave the work center two bodies short for most of the shift. [Encls (5), (6)]

18. AEAN Caserta went to [REDACTED] about his request to go to medical that day (18 June 2018) being denied by [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] conducted informal counselling

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with AEAN Caserta, during which they explained that he needed to communicate his medical appointments further in advance, and he needed to prioritize his PC qualification over his aircrewman package for the time being. This would give his package more merit and show progress in his WC. Caserta was receptive and understanding, but ██████████ felt that he betrayed his trust with Caserta by siding with ██████████. [Encls (5), (6)]

19. AEAN Caserta was counselled by the Maintenance Master Chief (██████████) and his LCPO (██████████) on 19 June 2018 in the Master Chief's office. This was informal counseling, after a lengthy phone conversation with Caserta's father (a retired Senior Chief Command Career Counselor) about his son's career and future in the squadron. ██████████ conveyed to him the importance of showing progress in the squadron and with his professional qualifications, and assured him that he would have his endorsement for his aircrew package if and when he completed his PC qualification. Caserta was receptive and vowed to complete his training. ██████████ did not think that Caserta was in distress or shaken after leaving his office. [Encls (7), (8)]

20. AEAN Caserta was counselled and recommended for Disciplinary Review Board (DRB) on 22 June 2018 due to his alleged failure to maintain a valid driver's license. He previously stated he didn't have a driver's license, just a state ID, but when his ID# was inputted in the AZ online database he did have one that was expired. [Encls (5), (6), (8), (9), (14)]

21. Due to his lack of a valid driver's license, AEAN Caserta had not been standing Duty Driver watch like some of his peers and superiors. The DRB was meant to determine if he had been subversive in telling the squadron he didn't have a driver's license. Most personnel interviewed stated he was most likely not being subversive. [Encls (5), (6), (8), (9), (14)]

22. ██████████ was on duty as the Assistant Squadron Duty Officer (ASDO) the weekend of 23-24 June 2018. She talked to Caserta when he called in to muster and later during a period of downtime on her personal cell phone, and stated he didn't sound right and questioned him about it. He did not respond to her queries. She did not think that he would harm himself. [Encls (3), (9)]

23. During the weekend of 23-24 June 2018, AEAN Caserta emailed ██████████ and ██████████ who were deployed with DET 4 embarked on the USS IWO JIMA. He asked "What was the meaning of life," but also told them goodbye and that he wouldn't be there when they returned. Both did not understand the messages and did not think that he would harm himself, however, they were also unable to respond due to straits transit communications blackout. [Encls (10), (11)]

24. The morning of 25 June 2018, AEAN Caserta gave two boxes of effects to ██████████ to be placed in the Ordnance Shop for ██████████. [Encl (3)]

25. At approximately 1500 on 25 June 2018, AEAN Brandon Caserta took off his cranial protective helmet, proceeded to the back of a turning MH-60S helicopter, and leapt into the spinning tail rotor blade, ending his life. [Encl (3)]

Summary of Interview of [REDACTED]

On 13 AUG 18, the Investigating Officer conducted an interview of [REDACTED] HSC-28. The interview was conducted in person at HSC-28 Squadron spaces. The contents of the interview are summarized substantially as follows:

[REDACTED] assumed his position as Maintenance Department Head in April of 2018. He was previously the OIC of the Naples Detachment. He had been briefed by the previous MO and MMCPO about 310 Work Center's LPO [REDACTED]'s leadership shortfalls.

310 WC has approximately 13-20 personnel working day and night check. [REDACTED] was day check LPO when AEAN Caserta was assigned to 310 WC (on or about JUL 17) for approximately one month prior to reassignment to Detachment 4 LPO. [REDACTED]'s November Evaluation was ranked EP. However, he was counselled that same month for his harsh and demeaning leadership style.

[REDACTED] was counselled again in January 18 for failure to correct his leadership shortcomings and subsequently removed from DET 4 and sent to anger management classes PIO thought to have been conducted.

No indications of continued demeaning or harsh leadership issues in 310, MO would routinely inquire and visit the shop, albeit a public forum.

After the incident on 25 June 18 several ANYMOUSE forms were submitted to the CO pointing out that [REDACTED]'s harsh and demeaning vernacular had not ceased. On 27 June [REDACTED] was counselled and removed as LPO of 310 WC after it became known of his derogatory and inflammatory comments concerning the deceased.

[REDACTED]'s contact information is:

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

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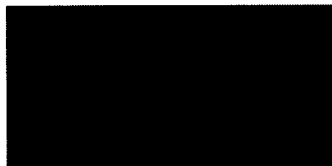
frequent the 310 WC shop and engage the sailors, but when directly asked if everything was going well they were met with platitudes of concurrence. Understandably so, it is extremely difficult to approach a superior or answer honestly when asked point blank if everything is going well, nobody wants to be solely responsible for taking shots at their immediate superior. Regardless, [REDACTED]'s noted belligerence, vulgarity, and brash leadership was likely a significant contributing factor in AEAN Caserta's decision to end his own life. [FF 13-15, 17-18, 34-35]

6. AEAN Caserta displayed many of the warning signs of depression and suicidal tendency during his last few weeks/days. He withdrew from his peers as expressed by [REDACTED] emailed to his deployed friends telling them goodbye, and, on the morning of his suicide, left a box of personal effects and letters for his friends and family. All personnel interviewed blamed themselves to degrees for not recognizing the warning signs in time. [FF 23-28]

Recommendations

1. Based on the witness statements and counseling records, there is sufficient evidence to take [REDACTED] to Captain's Mast for violation of UCMJ, Article 93 – Cruelty and Maltreatment. It is clear from the evidence that [REDACTED]'s behavior towards his subordinates was verbally abusive and demeaning. However, I recommend that the command transfer the member with a declining evaluation in lieu of awarding Captain's Mast. I do not recommend Captain's Mast due to the fact that the member can refuse Captain's Mast enduring to a Special or General Courts Martial, further extending the timeline, and exacerbating the healing process for all effected personnel.

2. The Commanding Officer should attempt to promote greater dialog between Officer and Enlisted and Senior and Junior personnel in the command; possibly during a Safety Stand Down or other such event. I recommend small mixed group discussion lead by counselors and/or Religious Programs Chaplains on how to help shipmates who may be depressed. I realize that Suicide Prevention is a routine GMT topic, but when an event such as this occurs people are more prone to opening up in small group settings with peers or near peers. Additionally, I know the Chaplains have had a noticeable presence since the event.



Summary of Interview of [REDACTED] (MMCO)

On 20 AUG 18, the Investigating Officer conducted an interview of [REDACTED] HSC-28. The interview was conducted in person at HSC-28 Squadron spaces. The contents of the interview are summarized substantially as follows:

[REDACTED] checked-in to HSC-28 in May of 2016 as the Maintenance Master Chief. Very visible in the squadron, visited all shops frequently and talked to the sailors. Made the decision to put [REDACTED] back into 310 WC and charge [REDACTED] with the leadership challenge of training him. The squadron only had one shift plus a swing catch crew, this prevented [REDACTED] from being placed in a different WC after removal from DET 4. Did not receive any complaints or reports from [REDACTED] or any of the 310 WC personnel, and checked on [REDACTED]'s progress routinely.

Counselled Caserta on 19 Jun 18 in regards to his qualifications and the way forward for his time in the squadron. He was receptive and vowed to complete his training. He was seen soon after conducting an aircraft move brief, no outward signs of distress. Did not believe that Caserta was subversive in not knowing he had an AZ drivers license. Talked to Caserta's father on 20 Jun IRT his qualifications and his son's way forward in the squadron. Father was receptive and conversation ended cordially.

[REDACTED] was not at the squadron on the day of the incident and was recalled after it happened. He was interviewed by SA Konikoff.

[REDACTED]'s contact information is:

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Enclosure (7)

Summary of Interview of [REDACTED]

On 14 AUG 18, the Investigating Officer conducted an interview of [REDACTED] HSC-28. The interview was conducted in HSC-28 spaces. The contents of the interview are summarized substantially as follows:

Checked into IISC-28 in July of 2015. Never was under [REDACTED], but dealt with him professionally and did not approve of his harsh leadership. Witnessed Caserta's bicycle accident in November of 2017, after which they became friends and texted daily. Discussed angst about not enjoying their jobs and rates, Caserta stated he didn't like [REDACTED] being his LPO 1-2 weeks prior to the incident. Caserta was happy on the surface but depressed, and after his bicycle accident his life seemed to spiral out of control. Was upset sometimes and would convey that via text message, did not specifically recommend seeing a professional about his depression and anger. [REDACTED] was on duty the weekend prior to the incident. Caserta called in to muster and didn't sound like right. She did not think that he would harm himself.

Parents contacted her 4-5 times, but does not take their calls anymore as it was not helping the grieving process.

[REDACTED]'s contact information is:

Phone: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]

Summary of Interview of [REDACTED]

On 14 AUG 18, the Investigating Officer conducted an interview of [REDACTED] HSC-28. The interview was conducted in HSC-28 spaces. The contents of the interview are summarized substantially as follows:

Checked into HSC-28 in August of 2015. Was in 310 WC until June of 2017, currently assigned to Detachment 4 in the 120 WC (Airframes). First met Caserta during his time in the ARO. Emailed and texted often, was deployed from February to August on DET 4. In January 2018, they went to visit a fellow sailor in rehab for alcohol ([REDACTED]), did not hang out routinely otherwise. Caserta had a positive outlook on the surface, but routinely vented about work and his aircrew package. Didn't understand why he was being required to get his PC qualification if he was transferring. Noticed that Caserta was distant in the month of June and sent few emails and texts. Did ask "what the meaning of life" was, and sent her an email the day before the incident saying goodbye. The ship was conducting straight transit and she was unable to email back or contact anyone. Did not think that he would harm himself. Was contacted by the family in July for information, had nothing to offer.

Was on DET 4 when [REDACTED] was removed as the LPO. He subverted authority and would demean sailors and use derogatory language towards them. Does not think that he should have been put in charge of 310 WC again. Thought requiring everyone to get PC qualification and 310 WC supervisor qualification hampered progress in getting actual rating shop qualifications. [REDACTED] was a one-upper, talked a lot about his previous experience but didn't get any qualifications that he supposedly previously held.

[REDACTED] s contact information is:

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Enclosure (9)

Summary of Interview of [REDACTED]

On 14 AUG 18, the Investigating Officer conducted an interview of [REDACTED] HSC-28. The interview was conducted in HSC-28 spaces. The contents of the interview are summarized substantially as follows:

Checked into HSC-28 in May of 2017. Went straight to 210 WC (AO shop), due to low manning. Talked to Caserta during work hours when he was in the ARO, and started texting outside of work in August of 2017. Text conversations would be about normal day to day things, but he opened up to her and talked a lot about [REDACTED] and how he couldn't stand him. Described Caserta as goofy but sincere, and was treated differently by some. Not bullying, but jokes at his expense were common. Contacted her via email prior to incident to say goodbye and wrote her a letter that was included in his personal effects. Caserta's family has contacted her but she told them she has nothing to offer them as far as information.

[REDACTED] contact information is:

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Enclosure 42

Summary of Interview of [REDACTED]

On 13 AUG 18, the Investigating Officer conducted an interview of [REDACTED] HSC-28. The interview was conducted in HSC-28 spaces. The contents of the interview are summarized substantially as follows:

Checked into HSC-28 in October of 2017. Was assigned to 310 WC in January of 2018, and is currently working in AV/I. Has known Caserta since October of 2017, and have socially interacted on multiple occasions but not frequently. [REDACTED] was on Day check most of the time to accommodate his attendance of church functions. Knew that Caserta harbored animosity towards the command and the Navy, and was passive aggressive about it and disgruntled about rating system. Caserta's father has contacted him twice to press for information about the command. [REDACTED] reached out to Caserta and brought him to church several times, but that was not a reoccurring endeavor.

[REDACTED] did not single out Caserta, he treated everyone equally poorly. [REDACTED] warned the shop about [REDACTED]'s return and encouraged them to come to her if things remained unchanged IRT his attitude and demeanor. [REDACTED] talked to [REDACTED] about [REDACTED] the Friday before the incident.

[REDACTED]'s contact information is:
Phone: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]

Enclosure (1)

Summary of Interview of [REDACTED]

On 13 AUG 18, the Investigating Officer conducted an interview of [REDACTED] HSC-28. The interview was conducted in person at HSC-28 Squadron spaces. The contents of the interview are summarized substantially as follows:

Had a personal relationship as well as professional, saw AEAN Caserta as a little brother and made it a point to always check on him. In May of 17 he talked with Caserta's father for over an hour. His father is a retired Navy Career Counselor Senior Chief. Around the same time, he noticed a change in Caserta and was concerned. Brought him to the Wing Chaplain to get help for depression. [REDACTED] has taken several sailors to chaplain or Portsmouth because of suicidal thoughts or expression.

Caserta didn't want to be a burden, only sought help if he couldn't do it himself. He specifically sought out [REDACTED] when his LPO wouldn't let him go to medical for tests pursuant his Aircrew package. [REDACTED] has spoken to [REDACTED] on several occasions about his manner of addressing sailors under him. [REDACTED] feel like he betrayed Caserta by taking [REDACTED]'s side in their last formal interaction, in which he conveyed the importance of completing his PC qualification and contributing to the shop. This would give the command no qualm in endorsing his Aircrew package.

[REDACTED] and the Command Master Chief were on the phone with the deceased's father at the time of the incident. They were explaining and assuaging the fathers concerns that they were ganging up on him and requiring excessive duty from him. This is in response to Caserta's most recent referral to Disciplinary Review Board (DRB) for failure to produce his drivers license and be included in the duty rotation with his peers as a Squadron Duty Driver. [REDACTED] personally questions the need for DRB referral, feels that he truly did not know he had a valid drivers license and possibly felt it was a violation of their trust.

[REDACTED]s contact information is:

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Enclosure K/1

Summary of Interview of [REDACTED]

On 14 AUG 18, the Investigating Officer conducted an interview of [REDACTED] HSC-28. The interview was conducted in HSC Winglant spaces. The contents of the interview are summarized substantially as follows:

Checked into HSC-28 in March of 2017. Initially assigned to Quality Assurance WC then to 310 WC as LPO. Caserta was assigned to WC 310 in June of 2017 after time in the ARO. Was his immediate supervisor for two months until he was promoted to Detachment 4 LPO in August. Engaged Caserta during his time in the ARO about pursuing qualifications early, and advised him to get his qualifications to give his aircrewman package more merit. Initial evaluation of Caserta was that he was a hard worker and would always be the first volunteer for any work task.

[REDACTED] was LPO of Detachment 4 from August 2017 to January 2018. He was counselled twice about his abrasive leadership and ordered to enroll in anger management. After second counselling was removed as DET 4 LPO and placed under a new chief as a leadership challenge. Chief was pursuing Safe For Flight (SFF) qualification and spent a majority of her time in Maintenance Control as Under Instruction (UI). [REDACTED] would conduct face-to-face debriefs as issues arose and advise her as to how he handled the situation. There was no formal remediation program per his counselling.

During April/May evaluation period [REDACTED] noticed that Caserta was not making much progress on his qualifications and had been in the squadron for almost 2 years. Injury aside he needed to show progress and attain his Plane Captain qualification. Caserta was counselled by [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] (LCPO) subsequently placed him on Extra Military Instruction (EMI) on 18 May 2018, Plane Captain board was scheduled for 15 June (in 1 month). Caserta went on leave after this to visit home in Arizona for two weeks. LPO reviewed qualification progress daily and made sure Caserta was aware of his timeline.

More issues arose on 18 June, when Caserta requested to go to medical unannounced and [REDACTED] told him he couldn't at that time. WC manning was such that it would require losing two personnel (Caserta and the person to drive him to medical since he didn't have a car or a driver's license), plus he had to go to Portsmouth Naval Hospital (at least a 4-hour evolution there and back). Caserta went to [REDACTED], the result was a sit down with [REDACTED] and Caserta about his qualification progress and how there needed to be more communication on when he needed to go to medical to coordinate transportation. Caserta was receptive and acknowledged his failure to make progress and said he would make better efforts. [REDACTED] did not see any change in his mentality after returning from leave.

[REDACTED] is currently assigned TAD to HSC WINGLANT Chaplain awaiting reassignment to another squadron. He has been participating in Self-Help classes and

[REDACTED] s contact information is:

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Enclosure (5)