A TALE OF TWO “PAULAS”
HOW NAVY BRASS TREATED A TRUE “WHISTLEBLOWER” (PAULA FISK) –
WHILE (PAULA COUGHLIN) – ADMIRAL’S AIDE OF “TAILHOOK” FAME
MADE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS

(EDITOR’S NOTE: This is the longest investigative article in the history of MilitaryCorruption.com. It took six months to research and write. This is the first published account of the Navy’s double standard of justice regarding two women named Paula. One, Paula Coughlin, ended up rich and famous. The other, Paula Fisk, is destitute and relatively unknown.)

This is the story of two women named “Paula.” Both have “battled” the U.S. Navy. But that is where the similarity between them ends.

Paula Fisk, a federal civil service worker assigned to the Miramar Naval Air Station (NAS) in California, prior to her illegal dismissal after 28 years of outstanding service, is a genuine “whistleblower” who was retaliated on and treated abusively by her chain-of-command.

Paula Coughlin is the onetime-aviator whose accusations led to a sex scandal at the 1991 “Tailhook Convention” in Las Vegas, Nev., which did more damage to the U.S. Navy than any occurrence since Pearl Harbor.

WE CONDEMN TRUE “SEXUAL HARASSMENT”

In no way does the staff or management of MilitaryCorruption.com condone or excuse the disgraceful and outrageous behavior of many of the aviators who attended “Tailhook.”

The excessive drinking, foul language, crude behavior and disrespect shown towards women was and is reprehensible, and deserved to be punished under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).

We at MilitaryCorruption.com do not tolerate actual “sexual harassment,” and consider that behavior a stain upon the honor and integrity of the officer corps.

But we also are aware of the terrible injustice “false” accusations bring – how lives and careers can be destroyed by a calculated lie, designed to “get even” or “get over.” Those who use the current atmosphere of “political correctness” in the U.S. military to make a false charge – where oftentimes an “accusation” by a female against a male is as good as a “conviction” – should be severely punished for such a crime.

Those women who bring “genuine” charges – such as the recent sex scandal at the Air Force Academy – don’t need their credibility damaged by others who use the “system” in a deceitful and dishonest way.

THE REAL “VICTIM” OF INJUSTICE

In studying at length the case of each “Paula,” we came to see one – Paula Fisk – as being a true “victim” of harassment and retaliation for exercising her legal right to file a complaint against such unlawful treatment.

We are appalled by the way Fisk was abused and discriminated against. Unfortunately, this dedicated civil servant, highly respected by co-workers and military personnel alike, had no “media connections.” No one to go to for national television exposure. Her documented case of deliberate attempts by the Navy to “punish” her for telling the truth, won her no riches or fame. It continues to make her life a living hell to this day.
However, in the case of Paula Coughlin, we found a series of disturbing facts, which make us doubt at least part of the former Navy lieutenant’s “story.”

The inconsistencies, embellishments, and her little-known record of falsely accusing not one, but two Marines, who were both later proven to be innocent, (one didn’t even attend Tailhook!) make us wonder what were Coughlin’s true motives? Her subsequent enrichment by several million dollars – through lawsuits against the Tailhook Association and Hilton Hotel Corporation – also is a cause for concern.

In this lengthy investigative article, we will give a detailed account of how the Navy – and even former President George Bush, who pandered to feminist voters in his losing 1992 re-election campaign – genuflected in front of a female officer whose credibility to this day remains in question.

THE POLITICIANS CLIMB ON THE “BANDWAGON”

Once Coughlin made “page one” of the Washington Post and was interviewed on television by ABC’s Peter Jennings, the former commander-in-chief and well-known World War II Navy pilot, wasted no time inviting Coughlin to the White House for “tea” with he and First Lady Barbara Bush.

Coughlin later told pals that Bush had “tears in his eyes” as he “comforted” her. Of course, the media was made well aware of the touching scene. However, one month later – on election day – few feminist votes were won by such an obvious political stunt.

Admirals shook in their shoes at the spectacle of the President of the United States, head of the nation’s armed forces, publicly consoling a person whose accusations had yet to be substantiated in any court of law. It was the most blatant violation of prohibitions against “undue command influence” the Navy had ever seen.

Bush was not the only politician to try and “make hay” from the Tailhook scandal.

Sanctimonious Sen. John McCain of Arizona, admittedly a “womanizer” in his early days in the Navy, and a man who cheated on and dumped his disabled wife to marry the young daughter of a wealthy beer magnate in the years following his return from prison camp in Vietnam, wrapped himself in a cloak of self-righteousness as he denounced the Navy for it's Tailhook abuses.

The shameless McCain successfully solicited Paula Coughlin’s public “endorsement” in his 1992 re-election campaign. He knew full well that if the Navy pilot involved herself in his senate race, it would be a clear violation of the Hatch Act, which prohibits federal employees and members of the active duty military from “campaigning” on behalf of political candidates. But the savvy McCain also knew that no one in the Navy or government would attempt to charge Coughlin with violation of that law.

As Greg Vistica wrote in his excellent book, FALL FROM GLORY – THE MEN WHO SANK THE U.S. NAVY:

“She (Paula Coughlin) had become an untouchable. No one at the upper reaches of the Navy would dare do or say anything that might offend her.”

McCain needed Coughlin’s “help” in a big way. Arizona is mostly Republican, but the “war hero’s” reputation – this was before he became a “media darling” – had been severely damaged when he was exposed as one of the “Keating Five” – five senators who took campaign “contributions” from convicted crook Charles Keating, best known for swindling senior citizens out of their life savings.

The Arizona lawmaker knew he needed a strong “female vote” to offset expected losses among conservatives to third-party candidate and former Republican Gov. Evan Mecham. If the GOP vote was split, a Democrat might win the senate seat once held by the venerable Barry Goldwater.

In part, due to McCain’s pandering to the feminist vote and securing the Coughlin endorsement, he won the election and was well on his way to establishing himself as a major player on the nation’s political landscape.

PAULA COUGHLIN’S LACK OF CREDIBILITY

When the disgruntled former admiral’s aide first came forward to issue her charges of being “mauled” by a gauntlet of drunken Tailhook aviators and her accusations were leaked to the media, Navy brass went into a “damage-control” mode.

The Navy’s Inspector General's Office and the NCIS (Naval Criminal Investigative Service) leaped into action. “Perpetrators” would have to be found and officers court-martialed to quiet the storm of public outrage. If some innocent aviators got “caught up in the dragnet,” so be it. Feminist politicians like Colorado’s Rep. Patricia Schroeder would not let the brass off the hook until “heads” were served up, preferably on a silver platter.

What ensued was a frenzied “witch hunt” that would have made Joe McCarthy proud. Naval investigators employed tactics that made a mockery of not only the U.S. Constitution, but disregarded regulations – such as prohibitions against coercion – in the imperfect and flawed UCMJ. To the military investigators, “the end justified the means.”

Officers were targeted by virtue of their rank, and subordinate officers encouraged to “rat them out” in order to “save” their own careers. Even if some officers were actually innocent,
“lower-rankers” were urged to accuse them of impropriety anyway, in exchange for little or no punishment for themselves.

Before the scandal had run its course, nearly 1500 aviators would have their careers damaged – many were destroyed. At least one accused officer committed suicide. Secretary of the Navy H. Lawrence Garrett was forced to “walk the plank,” as was the duplicitous former Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Frank Kelso.

First “head to roll” was Rear Admiral John W. Snyder, commanding officer of the Patuxent River Naval Air Station in Maryland – and Paula Coughlin’s “boss.” It was no secret that Coughlin was less than thrilled with Snyder even before the Tailhook convention was held. He was the first flag officer to be fired after the scandal broke.

FALSE ACCUSATIONS

On what basis did all this upheaval begin? What was the credibility of the “accuser,” Lt. Paula Coughlin?

Downplayed in the media or not reported at all, was the fact Coughlin failed to accurately pick out a photo from a lineup of her alleged attacker – the one who she claimed grabbed her breasts and lifted her up in the air. The first man she fingered, Coughlin claimed, “looks exactly like him.” The lieutenant assured investigators, “if that’s not him, it’s his brother.”

Wrong! The man Coughlin claimed assaulted her was what is called in law enforcement a “ringer.” He was a Marine stationed in the photo lab at Quantico, Va. and had never been to Tailhook in his life.

“Gee, I heard I picked the wrong guy,” Coughlin reportedly told frustrated investigators when they returned with more photos for her to review.

Right there, the NCIS should have realized Coughlin’s story had serious “problems.” But the political pressure to court-martial someone – anyone – in the highly charged case, was intense. So, back to the mug photos they went.

This time, Coughlin picked out another light-skinned African-American. But she couldn’t have made a worse choice. Not only did Marine Corps Capt. Greg Bonam have a clean record, he was a church-going Christian and family man. And he vehemently denied any misbehavior regarding Coughlin.

What happened next was best described in FALL FROM GLORY when author Vistica wrote that Navy lawyers, Capt. Mac Williams and chief JAG officer, Rear Admiral Ted Gordon, were “concerned” about winning a conviction because of Coughlin’s “credibility” problem:

“When she [Paula Coughlin] was asked to pick him [her main attacker] out of a photo line up, she identified the wrong man, a stand-in whom investigators had put in as a dupe. Later, with some hesitation, she fingered Bonam in a physical line-up held at the Marine base in Quantico, Va. She had also picked the wrong officer out of a photo line-up as the man she claimed yelled ‘Admiral’s aide’ when she was attacked in the guantlet.

“And there were no witnesses to support her story. She thought she had drawn blood when she bit Bonam, meaning hard enough to leave a scar, but there was no sign of any bite marks. She said he had been wearing a burnt-orange shirt, but a picture taken of Bonam that night showed him wearing a green shirt. Privately, both Williams and Gordon began to believe that Coughlin was embellishing her story, that she had probably been assaulted, but not in the dramatic fashion she was now claiming. Even [Secretary of the Navy] Dan Howard started to think Coughlin might even have her own agenda.”

For Capt. Bonam, who had to endure a “show trial” court-martial (he was later cleared of all charges), the soft-spoken Marine aviator might have escaped being sent to prison anyway. He had been diagnosed with malignant spinal cancer. Through a miracle, the cancer went into remission, helped not a bit by the extreme stress and mental torture of being tried for a crime he didn’t commit.

SHAVED LEGS AND MORE CONTRADICTIONS

The more investigators dug into Coughlin’s background, the more nervous they became. This was not only no “Little Miss Riding Hood,” Coughlin had a reputation as a foul-mouthed “party animal” who had attended Tailhook before.

“WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU THINK YOU’RE DOING?” Coughlin testified she shouted at one of her “attackers.” There was no way she could claim ignorance of what went on when aviators at the convention got drunk in the middle of the night.

One former boyfriend told Admiral Kelso’s staff that Coughlin had shown up at a Navy “dining-in party” wearing “black fishnet panty hose, high heels, a short black miniskirt, a black tuxedo jacket and carrying a large rubber dildo.” Not exactly the “Anita Hill” image the Navy would have preferred.

What’s worse, sworn testimony from Navy Lt. Rolando Diaz tended to undermine Coughlin’s credibility even more.

Diaz, nicknamed “The Barber of Seville,” set up a “leg and pubic hair shaving stand” in one of the Tailhook hospitality suites in Room 303 of the Las Vegas Hilton.

A long banner hung out front, advertising FREE LEG SHAVES. Not only did Diaz testify under oath that Coughlin had her legs shaved at his stand, she did it two nights in a row, he
Diaz testified that evening he noticed Coughlin was “drunk” and said she “autographed” his banner with the damming phrase: “YOU MAKE ME SEE GOD. THE PAULSTER.”

Harried NCIS agents were in “no hurry” to weaken their case by comparing “handwriting samples.” They already knew they had a real “mess” in their hands.

Former pilot Tamela Redford told investigators she saw Paula Coughlin in “Navy whites” getting her legs shaved by a male officer the day before the lieutenant was “groped” by a gang of drunken aviators in the hotel hallway.

“I was appalled at the disrespect she showed her uniform,” the female pilot recalled. “For that person to be tearing the Navy apart really amazes me.”

“A RESIGNATION” – AND GOING FOR THE “BIG BUCKS”

After the initial burst of adoring publicity, Coughlin resumed her Navy career. The only problem was, she had become a “pariah” everywhere. Paula’s male colleagues avoided her like the plague.

However, in 1992 Coughlin extended her tour as a Navy helicopter pilot for at least six years and received a fat bonus of $60,750. Less than a year later, Coughlin “resigned” her commission and left the Navy after receiving a “mediocre” performance evaluation. If she thought she could “parlay” her high-visibility role in the Tailhook controversy into a “fast-track promotion” to lieutenant commander, she was in for a rude shock. Coughlin may have “sunk” the careers of “admirals to ensigns,” but she would not be rewarded for it with another stripe. Even the Navy wouldn’t stoop that low.

No word on whether Coughlin ever paid the money she got in her “bonus” back to the government. She only did one year of the six required, but in her exalted position, it is doubtful anyone would “press the issue” about a mere sixty thousand bucks. And Paula Coughlin was about to make some really BIG money. She would hit the “jackpot” in Las Vegas, but not at the crap tables.

TRIAL LAWYERS TO THE RESCUE

Now a civilian, but not in much demand for well-paid public appearances – Anita Hill was pulling down $10,000 a talk – Coughlin turned to the trial lawyers to sue a company with very deep pockets.

The former Navy lieutenant charged the Hilton Hotel Corporation, host of the annual Tailhook confab, “failed to provide adequate security” – thus leading to her “ordeal.”

During the trial, Coughlin claimed Tailhook caused her such “suffering” that she contemplated “suicide” and was frequently “depressed.” Tough cross-examination by Hilton Hotel attorneys as to “why” she would continue to “fly helicopters in such a mental state” brought a reply notable for its verbal gymnastics.

“I made an agreement with my commanding officer that I would never fly if I was too distracted or incapable,” she said.
When pressed as to why she was allowed to fly at all, when military pilots are routinely grounded if they exhibit unusual stress or have severe personal problems, Coughlin virtually “sputtered” on the witness stand.

“I think you’re being mean!” she blurted out. “I had a very clear relationship with my commanding officer regarding my mental health!”

Like the “O.J. jury in California,” the panel in Nevada had an agenda of their own. They wanted to “sock it to” the “megabucks” Hilton Hotel chain. Paula won the “jackpot” - $1.7 million in “compensatory damages” and an additional $5 million in “punitive damages.”

While a Federal district judge later reduced the Hilton “haul” to a measly $5.2 million, Coughlin “scored” again when the Tailhook Association settled with her “out-of-court” for $400,000. That brought her loot to a grand total of $5.6 million.

Move over Lee Majors! You may have been television’s “Six Million Dollar Man,” but poor Paula Coughlin, groped in a hallway by drunken aviators, is the “Six Million Dollar Woman.”

AN OPEN LETTER TO PAULA COUGHLIN

When you won your huge cash settlement in Las Vegas, you grinned for the cameras and told reporters you were “very pleased.” Then you said all you wanted to do was to “slip into obscurity.” We can see why. You probably couldn’t believe your good luck.

Well, for a “millionairess,” you certainly have kept a low profile. Even we at MilitaryCorruption.com, who pride ourselves on “finding” just about anyone, couldn’t locate you. Not only have you slipped “into obscurity,” you are clear off the radar screen and very much gone to ground.

Here’s your chance to “resurface.”

We hope you don’t think we’ve been too rough on you, Paula, but just in case you do, the editors of this web site offer you an equal amount of space on these pages to state your case and “correct” any misconceptions we may have had about your motives or agenda.

The only stipulation for our granting you “equal space” to reply, is that you answer a few honest questions from us first.

(1) – How many dollars, out of your millions, have you donated to a battered women’s shelter?

(2) – Have you ever apologized to the two Marines you falsely accused – especially Greg Bonam, who had to battle cancer and you at the same time?

(3) – Are you now, or have you ever been, the recipient of a VA disability pension for PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), which currently amounts to some $2200 a month (tax-free) for a 100% rating? Are you aware Vietnam combat veterans have to fight for years to reach that level of compensation? Do you think the “groping” you got at Tailhook is equal to their nightmares and flashbacks?

(4) – Are you willing to submit to a polygraph test, paid for by MilitaryCorruption.com, to verify the veracity of your charges on what really happened at Tailhook?

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

COMPARE THE PLIGHT OF PAULA FISK

As we stated earlier, Paula Fisk was a top-notch worker at the Family Support Center, Miramar NAS when she suffered vicious reprisals for filing “whistleblower complaints.”

Misappropriation of funds, no FSC written guidelines, deliberate inflation of statistics, employees harassed and chastised publicly by management in a very “hostile work environment,” Fisk saw it all. A Department of Defense “Hotline Complaint Report” confirmed the Miramar facility was “as unhealthy as any dysfunctional family or organization could be.”

Fisk was called in and fired three days before Christmas 1996, by the Navy commander at Miramar. With 28 years of service, just two years short of retirement, the female “whistleblower” was emotionally devastated and financially ruined.

“Due to the reprisal and cruelty of that Navy officer, I was left with little money for food or medicine. I couldn’t afford to keep paying my house mortgage, so I rented my home out and moved into a small apartment in Hemet, Calif,” she said.

SENT TO A “HEADSHRINKER” WHO VIOLATED ETHICS

Fisk, who is disabled, fell deeper into depression. She recalled for MilitaryCorruption.com how, when she first filed for Office of Worker’s Compensation Program (OWCP) benefits, they sent her to one of their “hired gun” psychiatrists. He turned out to be a “sexual predator” who was later fired for “plying female patients with alcohol” at sessions and “enticing them to have sex with him.”

When she rebuffed his advances during their first meeting, the angry “head doctor” labeled Fisk a “sociopath” after a five-minute “psychological exam.” The “shrink” that did this no
longer has a license, but his specious “evaluation” of Fisk still is accepted and used by the local OWCP to deny the California woman her deserved compensation and benefits.

The OWCP did not like her treating psychiatrist who diagnosed a “direct connection” between the workplace “hostile working environment” and her mental condition. This would have entitled her to benefits and medical care.

OWCP and the Navy should be in violation of federal legislation (introduced by Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif.) that prohibits the military services from using psychiatric examinations or hospitalization as a way of intimidating and silencing “whistleblowers.” Trouble is, only “military women” are covered under the law. Female federal civil servants – civilians – are still sent to “discredited psychiatrists” against their will, if they sufficiently “aggravate” their superiors and OWCP. Fisk has submitted numerous psychiatric evaluations to overcome the OWCP discredited psychiatrist, but to no avail.

NEVER GIVE UP!

Fisk said the Navy hoped she’d just “go away” or better yet, “commit suicide.” For a while, it was “touch and go” in her life. Due to lack of income, Fisk was forced to move eight times in six years. At one point, she was relegated to recycling soda cans for food vouchers.

This courageous woman refused to give in. Taking the bus from Hemet to San Diego – she couldn’t afford to own or drive a car – Fisk filed a lawsuit against the Navy at the Federal Courthouse.

“I was so broke, I used $150 in food money I’d been saving to pay the fee. I filed the case in my own handwriting – it was all handwritten,” Fisk recalled. “I wasn’t going to let them get away with stealing my retirement and benefits from me.”

The Navy, admitting no blame, quickly settled the case for a pittance. The attorney Fisk hired to work on a percentage basis, forged her signature to the agreement to quickly get his “cut.” Fisk ended up with just $21,000. Not nearly enough to pay her accumulated debts.

INJUSTICE AT THE OWCP

Now her only hope for solvency is to win her long battle with the U.S. Department of Labor. OWCP was originally created so federal employees could get immediate help for their injuries, but in Fisk’s case, this has not happened.

The National Association of Federally Employed Women Legal and Education Fund (FEW/LEF) has established a legal defense fund for Paula Fisk to be used in her fight for workers compensation benefits for her disability caused by the “hostile working conditions” she experienced at the FSC at Miramar NAS.

However, since no one knows about this fund, Fisk is not receiving any money for the funds to be continued and matched. The hostile workplace she endured for many years has left her severely disabled and unable to publicize her plight until now.

“This is more than just a fight for my rights and what I am entitled to,” she says. “I am waging this battle on behalf of all my sisters among the female civilian employees. Never again should female civil servants who file occupational disease stress claims be routinely ordered to psychiatric exams by discredited, suspended, or revoked medically-licensed practitioners.”

WHO IS MORE WORTHY OF YOUR HELP?

Paula Fisk refuses to give up after six years of hell. She unselfishly thinks of others and tries to correct injustice wherever she finds it. That is why we found her case so compelling. But also it stands in stark contrast to the Paula Coughlin “saga.”

One woman gives nearly 30 years of her life to serving the military and is left practically penniless. The other does less than ten years in uniform, becomes the most infamous woman in the annals of the United States Navy, and ends up with millions of dollars in court settlements.

It was indeed, the most expensive and lucrative “grope” in recorded history.

IF YOU ADMIRE PAULA FISK’S DETERMINATION TO OBTAIN JUSTICE, NO MATTER WHAT THE ODDS AGAINST HER, PLEASE HELP YOU CAN REACH HER THROUGH THIS WEB SITE. ANY CONTRIBUTIONS YOU CAN SEND WOULD BE MOST APPRECIATED – THE EDITORS.