

Female B-52 pilot axed over adultery

WASHINGTON. — In the face of a rising storm in Congress, the

FIRST LT KELLY J FLINN arrives to await word on her pending court-martial at Minot Air Force Base North Dallas. Dr ANN DUNCAN, a member of the defence team, accompanies her.

Air Force yesterday defended its decision to court-martial the country's first female B-52 bomber pilot for adultery.

The trial of Lieutenant Kelly Flinn at an air base in North Dakota has been on hold since Tuesday while Air Force secretary Sheila Widnall considers the pilot's request for an honourable discharge in lieu of a court martial. A

decision was not expected yesterday, the Air Force said.

The Air Force's military chief went on the offensive at a Senate subcommittee hearing amid an uproar over the case, which has been widely perceived as the Air Force's unfair meddling in people's private lives.

"This is an issue about an officer who is entrusted to fly nuclear weapons who disobeyed an order, who lied. That is what this is about," said General Ronald Fogleman.

Granting Lt Flinn, who is single, an honourable discharge in lieu of court martial when she had been charged with adultery, fraternisation, disobeying an order and lying would be unprecedented, Air Force officials said.

Lt Flinn faces a maximum of nine and a half years in prison if found guilty.

Turning up the heat on the Air Force were members of Congress sympathetic to Lt Flinn, including Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, who said the pilot had been "badly abused" by the Air Force.

"A career has already been destroyed. Who is going to benefit from this?" he asked reporters yesterday.

Lt Flinn has admitted to having an affair with a married civilian, but said he conned her into believ-

ing he was legally separated and filing for a divorce. She also admitted to a fling with an enlisted man.

Both are violations of Air Force rules against adultery and fraternisation, but her supporters argue that the service routinely gives men in such cases less severe punishments.

Air Force officials say what makes Lt Flinn's case more serious is that she lied and disobeyed an order to stay away from her lover — violations of codes of military conduct essential to good order and discipline.

In an outpouring of letters to newspapers and members of Congress, the public has generally sided with the 26-year-old pilot, who is seen by many as the victim of a male-dominated military establishment intruding in people's private lives.

But the case is getting messier by the day.

The pilot's lover, Marc Zigo, called a television talk show on Tuesday with the claim that Lt Flinn was not telling the truth because she had known he was married.

A letter to Ms Widnall signed by Gayla Zigo, his now ex-wife, said Lt Flinn "knew we were married and not separated but that did not stop her". It expressed anger that Lt Flinn might get an honourable discharge and escape trial. — Sapa-AFP.



THE CITIZEN

Adulterous pilot allowed to quit

Page 20

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WASHINGTON. —

US Air Force pilot Kelly Flinn lost her bid for an honourable discharge, but will be allowed to resign from the service rather than face court-martial on charges of adultery, lying and disobedience, the Air Force said yesterday.

Air Force Secretary Sheila Widnall ordered that Lieutenant Flinn be granted a general discharge from the Air Force. That decision represents a relatively mild punishment compared to the lengthy prison she could have faced if convicted on all charges and given a maximum sentence.

Ms Widnall scheduled a late afternoon news conference to discuss her decision.

A general discharge may mean that Lt Flinn, the Air Force's first female bomber pilot, cannot fly in the Air National Guard, which she had wanted to do to build flying time toward a career as a commercial pilot.

The case has drawn national attention to the military policy of prosecuting adultery cases. Lt Flinn, a 1st lieutenant based at Minot Air

Force Base, North Dakota, now admits to having had an affair with the husband of a female Air Force enlistee. But when first approached about the situation in December by Air Force investigators, she denied the affair in a written statement.

She also disobeyed an order to stay away from the man, civilian Marc Zigo.

If tried and convicted, she would have faced a maximum of nine years, six months in prison.

The Air Force has come under heavy criticism from Capitol Hill, including Senate Republican Majority Leader Trent Lott for excessive moralism in pursuing ac-

cused adulterers. Top Air Force officials have vented frustration that public attention has focused only on the adultery and not on what they view as the more serious offences of lying and disobeying an order.

"Although it is the adultery charge that has received the greatest publicity, it is the allegations of lack of integrity and disobedience to order that have been of principal concern to the Air Force," the Air Force said in a one-page statement.

Lt Flinn had faced five separate charges:

- Disobeying an order, which carries a maximum sentence of six months in a military prison and a bad conduct discharge, the worst kind other than dismissal.
- Lying, the most serious offence, which carries a five-year maximum prison term and dismissal.
- Adultery, with a one-year maximum prison sentence and dismissal.
- Fraternisation, with a maximum two years conduct unbecoming, an official prison and dismissal.

The fraternisation charge stems from a separate relationship Lt Flinn had in June 1996 with an Air Force enlisted man. — Sapa-AFP. See Page 26.

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