Dear Mr. Garlick,

Per your request here is the detailed time line of events.

My demographics are correct.

On Sunday March 06, 2016, I attended a Retirement Ceremony in Bldg. 185 for long-time, USAFR Co-Worker, Brian Rutherford. MSgt Rutherford invited Retired SMSgt Oscar Rodriguez to perform the flag folding ceremony at his own retirement. After the event, I spoke directly to Mr. Rodriguez and applauded his performance and explained that I'd heard his voice play during dozens of retirements throughout my career. Due to the passion and inflection he gives when doing the speech, I asked if there would be any chance I could get him to come back in a month’s time to perform in the same exact manner, as he had done for MSgt Brian Rutherford. He told me it would be a privilege to honor my career and the flag.

 Several days later, when speaking with TSgt Trevor Newsom, my retirement coordinator, I was advised that Oscar may not be able to attend the ceremony, that he did not know all of the details, and that I would need to contact SMSgt Joe Bruno to discuss the matter. On March 08, 2016, I placed a call to Joe Bruno’s cell phone of 707-301-7159 but never received a return call. On March 15, 2016, I arrived at Bldg. 185 at approximately 1130 to perform a week of Annual Tour duty. I mentioned to SMSgt Joe Bruno that I never received a call back from the voice mail message I left for him on March 08. He explained that Oscar could not be a part of my flag folding ceremony because Lt. Col. Sovitsky had banned him from the building. SMSgt Joe Bruno stated that he was just the messenger and stated that I could have my ceremony at the Museum where I could do what I wanted, and the reason was because there was an issue between Lt. Col. Sovitsky and Mr. Rodriguez.

At this point, although very disappointed, I was going to roll over and accept this word as gospel as I have done so many times throughout my career. Always doing as I'm told, regardless of my personal feelings towards the job. After talking with many other Airmen and friends, I was advised that the retirement ceremony was to honor me and my last day of service and that the beginning part of the ceremony is the only official part and the rest of it was unofficial for me to do as I pleased.

 I spoke with Chief Smelser regarding the issue, He advised me that he, himself, would like Oscar to perform at his own retirement. He stated that our buildings auditorium is shared by three squadrons and that he did not see how Lt. Col. Sovitsky could ban Oscar from the building.

I left the base at the end of the day on 19 March 2016 to return home for a week of work at my civilian job. I returned to Travis Bldg. 185 on March 28, 2016.

 On March 28, 2016, at approximately 10:00, I spoke with Chief Smelser, and was advised that because of things he had heard, he thought Oscar had been banned from doing the Flag Folding Speech, and recommended that I not have Oscar do it at my ceremony.  If he was an invited guest, though, he could attend my ceremony.

 On March 29, 2016, I advised Mr. Rodriguez that my leaders did not want him to perform the speech at my ceremony. However, I also told Mr. Rodriguez that I did, and always have. I did want to make sure he had not been banned from the base or from doing the speech. Mr. Rodriguez said that he had not. I told Mr. Rodriguez that I would let the decision be his as I have been told that only the first part of the ceremony was official, and the rest of it was unofficial and just wanted to make sure I was not breaking any regulations or protocol. Mr. Rodriguez told me that he would do what he could to make my event drama free. I explained that I just wanted to share his passion of what our flag and country means, in a way that only he can present. Not to make me look good, but it will make me feel good that my family, friends, and co-workers will get to hear those words that always bring a tear to my eye.

On March 30, 2016, Mr. Rodriguez told me that he had made a few calls and sent a few messages. On April 01, 2016, I let Mr. Rodrigues know that Chief Smelser had asked me what was going on with my flag folding portion of my retirement. I told him that I had asked Mr. Rodriguez to come perform the speech for my ceremony at my retirement after seeing him perform at Brian Rutherford's ceremony. Also, that I had informed Mr. Rodriguez of what was told to me by Joe Bruno, that Mr. Rodriguez was not allowed in the building. I advised Mr. Rodriguez that, evidently, he had gotten the wing commander's attention as Chief Smelser said he knew that Mr. Rodriguez had sent a text to him. That is how I know he had been contacted. I advised Chief Smelser that I did not care what the prior personal issues were, but that I would like Mr. Rodriguez to perform the flag folding speech. He stated he didn’t believe there would be a problem with Mr. Rodriguez coming as my guest, but he didn’t believe he could do the speech. He felt Mr. Rodriguez had been banned from doing it. At this point, I sent Mr. Rodriguez a copy of my invitation and also had him added to my guest list. Mr. Rodriguez advised that he had contacted the IG HQ, the Wing Commander, General Johnson of the USAFR, and others. I advised Mr. Rodriguez that they had conceded and understood he would be my guest at the ceremony, but they were adamant that he not do the speech.

 On April 02, 2016, I advised Mr. Rodriguez that I was in a meeting earlier with SMSgt Joe Bruno, and SMSgt Keith Bennett and was told it was my choice to have you there, but was asked to have you not come. SMSgt Joe Bruno stated he did not want you to come. They stated you would not be doing the flag folding ceremony. I was told if you came as my guest, you would be just a guest and to stay in your seat. I advised Mr. Rodriguez if he wanted to bail out, I wouldn’t blame him. Mr. Rodriguez asked me what their reasons were that they did not want him to do the speech, and I advised him that they said some General told him that he couldn’t do the speech at retirements. Also, there was a list of personal stories that I did not believe to be true, and I chose to look beyond here-say and rumors. Mr. Rodriguez indicated this to be a false statement and was never told by any general not to do this speech. On April 03, 2016, I advised Mr. Rodriguez that Lt. Col. Sovitsky approached me and said he was sorry, but wanted to make sure Mr Rodriguez knew he was not allowed to perform the flag folding speech. I told him he was aware of his request. I informed Mr Rodriguez that I was told by Lt. Col Sovitsky that it was due to an issue from the past, but that I had still hoped he would be able to do the speech, however, I would leave the decision up to him.

At 1300, I met with Major Stephan Sila, who was my officiating officer for the event. We went through the rehearsal motions several times in order to learn the proper sequence of events. During this time, my wife, and other family members and friends began to show up. While we were still practicing our moves, the individuals who were to perform the flag folding ceremony practiced their procedures with music playing in the background. At approximately 1440, I went to the locker room to change from my ABU’s into my blues for the ceremony. I met with the Chaplain, Colonel Hall, who advised me he would have to run just after the invocation, which I had asked him to be closed in Jesus name.

The Ceremony went on with very little discrepancies and my wife even gathered up the courage to say some nice things about me and my Air Force family. After the end of the slideshow that I had requested to be played, the airmen from my unit, who were not Honor Guard, began to unfurl the flag. At a point Mr. Rodriguez stood to the right of the flag and prepared to give the flag folding speech, just as he had done at MSgt Rutherford’s retirement nearly one month prior. I do not recall Mr. Rodriguez even being in the auditorium so I do not know if he was approached by anyone before he came up to present his speech. After he got a few words into the speech he was grabbed, pushed, and shoved out the back door trying to recite the words to the speech. I noticed TSgt Hall was standing to Mr. Rodriguez right just before he stepped directly in front of Mr. Rodriguez. The two other individuals I saw that were involved in ejecting Mr. Rodriguez were SMSgt Joe Bruno, and CMSgt Cordes.

I couldn’t believe what I witnessed had truly taken place. I should have just declined having a ceremony altogether, as I know I will never be able to remove the images of Mr. Rodriguez being ejected from my ceremony. It not only affects me, but my family, friends, and fellow airman that I have worked with from all different squadrons. What is most upsetting to me is that the flag itself was disgraced and that truly cuts me to my core.

After my ceremony during my reception at Bldg 185 I was asked by Chief Smelser to come speak with the police regarding Mr. Rodriguez. I do not recall the name of the officer I spoke to, but he was wearing what appeared to be a dark blue uniform and appeared to have small stripes near his elbow. This was not an ABU military uniform but possibly that of a contract guard, or off base officer, I was not sure. He was standing near the main entry door to the auditorium. Lt. Col. Sovitsky was standing to his right. I was asked if Mr. Rodriguez was an invited guest. I replied "Absolutely, I invited him as my guest." After a few moments, I asked if I could return to my reception and was advised that I could.

After the ceremony, I had a dinner gathering of friends and family. Unfortunately, I was so torn by what had happened I was unable to eat one bite.

On Tuesday, I was contacted by Chief Smelser. When I returned the call from my cell phone to his cell phone I was advised I was on speaker phone with Major Noyer, The First Shirt, SMSgt Joe Bruno, and a Travis PR rep whose name I did not hear. Although it was very hard to hear, I attempted to answer their questions, which were, did I invite Mr. Rodriguez to my ceremony? Yes. Did I know if Mr. Rodriguez would get up and give his speech? No, but I had hoped he would, as I had asked him to. Did Mr. Rodriguez know some folks in my unit did not want him to give the speech? Yes, I advised Mr. Rodriguez previously of this information although it did not change my opinion of wanting him to do it. As previously stated, I left the decision up to Mr. Rodriguez and I had understood that anything after the Medal presentation and posting of the retirement order, that everything after that point was considered unofficial although I knew that if Mr. Rodriguez were to present a speech during the flag folding portion, that it would be similar, if not the exact same as the one that he just performed at MSgt Brian Rutherford's retirement ceremony less than a month prior to my own. I believe I understood correctly what the official part of my retirement ceremony to be because the speech Major Sila presented, as well as my own speech, and slideshow presentation were non-scripted and spontaneous even though I read most of mine from what I had written down, although not all of it was on paper.

After this phone conversation Major Sila set up a meeting with Col. Pickard, and Major Noyer at Bldg. 31 as Major Sila wanted to make sure the information provided came directly from us to him to avoid any confusion or misunderstanding there could be resulting in the poor quality of the cellular conference call I participated in earlier.

During the 45-60 minute meeting we discussed the details prior to and during my retirement ceremony as well as my earlier conference call. I explained that there were really only two things that I had wanted at my retirement ceremony, that being Major Sila to be the officiating officer to retire me, and the flag folding speech to be done by Mr. Rodriguez due to the passion and delivery of what represents our Flag which is what I have previously heard done at dozens of retirements I have attended in the past. I felt it was both an honor and a privilege that Mr. Rodriguez agreed to do this, to honor my service and the flag, early on when I had first asked him. Although I had relayed the information to Mr. Rodriguez that my leaders did not want him to perform the speech, I never once said that I did not want him to perform this speech. Although no notes were taken during our meeting, Col. Pickard stated that it sounded like there was some misunderstandings that led to this unfortunate ending to my ceremony. At the close of the meeting Major Noyer asked if I recalled a meeting where I was told that if Mr. Rodriguez came to perform the speech, that he would be removed. I advised I did not recall any such meeting. It was agreed by all of us at the table that this was a very unfortunate thing to have happen.

I have slept and eaten little since the time of this event and it is a picture that plays over and over in my mind. I am embarrassed that my many friends, family members, and co-workers had to see this happen but I am mostly disturbed that it was such a disgrace to the flag and feel the matter could have been handled much more professionally.

It was not until I heard that the Travis AFB Public Relations office was putting out information that Mr. Rodriguez was not an invited guest, and that he had been banned from the base, that I made my opinion public to correct any misinformation and set the truth straight. It is extremely disturbing that, although I believe I provided the facts truthfully and accurately, that Mr. Rodriguez was portrayed as not my invited guest, even after telling the security officer that he was, and that he was escorted out the front gate by an off base officer. Not only that, but after giving my information during the cellular phone conference call, and also to Major Noyer and Col. Pickard directly, what was released to the public was quite the opposite from the information I provided. If Mr. Rodriguez was truly banned from the base, I question why I was not informed of this, and also why he was allowed to perform this speech just less than a month prior. Did this ban come afterwards? If so, I was not aware.

I have never had any issues with my leadership or Commander Lt. Col. Sovitsky in any way, shape or form. There was never any ill intent, or hoping the see events unfold as they did. I was hoping that a great retirement ceremony would turn into something I would have considered to be excellent and phenomenal, and my friends, family, and co-workers could be witness to the end of my honorable career. I also do not believe I was disobeying any orders, regulations, or AFI’s even though I knew that some did not want Mr. Rodriguez at my retirement, or to speak the flag folding speech.

This information has taken me several days to compile because I have been working 12 hour shifts with very little food and sleep. I apologize for any delay however I wanted to be sure I was able to reflect the events truthfully and accurately.

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Charles L. Roberson, MSgt (Ret), USAFR