

# Military Rape Documentary 'Invisible War' Leads to Policy Changes Before Its Opening

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"The Invisible War," a devastating documentary about the tens of thousands of sexual assaults that take place within the U.S. military every year, has already had an effect on policy even before its release on Friday.

Within days of seeing the film in April, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced a crucial change in the way in which reported rapes will be investigated in the military – and he told one of the film's executive producers that the screening was partly responsible for his decision.

Last week, a major general who appears in the film as a defender of the way the military has handled the cases – and who in the process appeared to be a rather clueless apologist for a badly broken system – was replaced.

And attention to the issue has continued to grow both in the media and in Congress, where a number of bills have been introduced to deal with the issue.

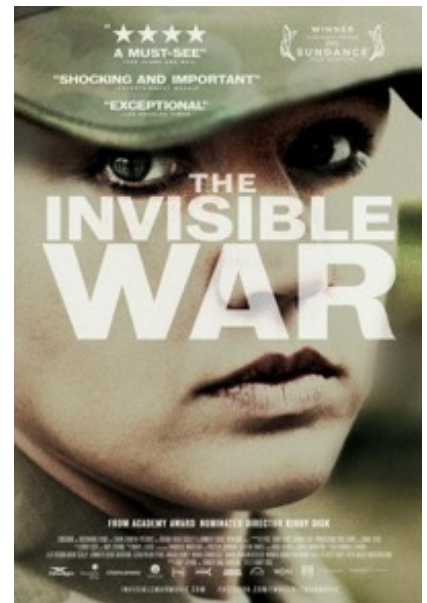
"We made the film to help change policy," writer-director Kirby Dick told TheWrap on Monday. "We just didn't think it would happen this soon."

The documentary, which was made by Dick and producers Amy Ziering and Tanner King Barklow and is being distributed by Cinedigm and Docurama Films, screened at the Los Angeles Film Festival over the weekend. On Tuesday, the filmmakers will be in Washington, where they will hold a screening on Capitol Hill for members of Congress and their staffs.

"The Invisible War" collects the stories of dozens of rape and assault victims, most but not all of them women, who were attacked by fellow servicemen while on duty. Their stories tell of a military bureaucracy that protected the perpetrators and often ostracized or ignored the victims.

Of the more than 19,000 sexual assaults estimated by the Department of Defense to have taken place last year, fewer than 14 percent are reported to authorities. Less than half of those are referred for disciplinary action, and only 191 perpetrators – less than six percent of those accused – were convicted or court-martialed.

When the film debuted at Sundance in January, wrote TheWrap's Sharon Waxman, "it exploded with the power of suppressed fury." The film went on to win the Audience Award for documentary and later screened at the Tribeca Film Festival before coming to LAFF.



**Also read:** ['Invisible War' Exposes Widespread Rape, Cover-Up in U.S. Military](#)

But Dick and Ziering also set their sights on a different audience, the director said.

"Once the film won the audience award at Sundance, we decided to embark on a campaign to get this film seen at the highest levels of the Pentagon, in Congress, at the Department of Defense," he said. "The way we did this was by having dozens of private screenings for retired generals, active-duty officers, officers' wives' clubs and veterans groups, to start the buzz around the film. But we also went wider than that, to corporate leaders and nonprofit leaders and people high up in the media that interact with the Pentagon."