

The Courier-Journal

FRIDAY, JANUARY 19, 2001 •

Marine accused of falsifying Osprey maintenance records relieved of duty

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Marine Corps officer was relieved of duty as commander of the only V-22 Osprey training squadron yesterday after being accused anonymously of ordering the falsification of the aircraft's maintenance records.

In announcing the allegations

and the action against Lt. Col. Odin Fred Leberman, the Marine Corps said "at this point" it believes there is no connection between the alleged falsification of records and the causes of two Osprey crashes last year that killed 23 Marines.

"There is nothing in these allegations, even if substantiated, that would have affected the

safety of the aircraft," said Maj. Patrick Gibbons, a spokesman at Marine Corps headquarters in the Pentagon.

Leberman, 45, had commanded the training squadron at Marine Corps Air Station New River, N.C., since June 1999.

The Marines also said the service's inspector general,

Brig. Gen. Timothy Ghormley, arrived at New River yesterday with an eight-member investigating team to interview all 241 members of the squadron. Gibbons said Leberman is the subject of the investigation, but "they are going to take a very detailed look at the entire squadron."

The Osprey, which uses tilt-

rotor technology to take off and land like a helicopter and fly like an airplane, has come under intense fire from critics, including some members of Congress, since one crashed last April in Arizona, killing all 19 Marines aboard. Investigators blamed it on human error.

On Dec. 11, another Osprey crashed in North Carolina, kill-

ing four Marines. That crash is under investigation.

Both Ospreys were part of Leberman's squadron.

Repeated calls to New River, where Leberman is based, to seek comment from him were not immediately returned. Gibbons said he did not know whether Leberman disputes the allegations against him.