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Mentor Says McChrystal Is 'Crushed' by the Change in His Circumstances

By **ELISABETH BUMILLER**

WASHINGTON — The White House sent a powerful signal this week by permitting Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal to retire with all of his four stars, but the general's most important mentor, Adm. Mike Mullen, still described him as "crushed" during the shock of a transition from commanding nearly 100,000 American troops in Afghanistan to living in exile on the Potomac.

By the time Gen. David H. Petraeus hustled into General McChrystal's old quarters at the international military headquarters in the heart of Kabul, the Afghan capital, on Friday, General McChrystal had retreated to his home at Fort McNair, the quiet, two-century-old Army post built on a point of land where the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers meet. Colleagues said that General McChrystal's overnight metamorphosis from the nation's most important general to its most humiliated was numbing, but that he would recover psychologically and survive professionally.

"In time he will put this in perspective because of the contribution he has made to this country, and I think he will at some point make peace with himself," said Gen. Jack Keane, the retired vice chief of staff of the Army, who has been in touch by e-mail with General McChrystal. "I suspect he's thinking he let everybody down, he let his troops down, he let his team down, he let the chain of command down."

Admiral Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, visited General McChrystal at Fort McNair the day he was dismissed by the president, and later told military officials in Kabul that the general and his wife, Annie, were "crushed" by the turn of events. But Admiral Mullen told the officers he believed that the McChrystals would be able to move on.

Senior military officers were in widespread agreement that the president had no choice but to fire General McChrystal after he and his staff were quoted in a Rolling Stone article disparaging Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. and other senior Obama administration officials.

But they said the president's decision to allow General McChrystal to retire with four stars was an important indicator for future potential employers — perhaps some defense contractors lining the Beltway around Washington — that he was not radioactive, at least as far as the White House was concerned.

Forcing him to retire with three stars “would have sent a signal that he was out of favor,” said [John A. Nagl](#), a retired lieutenant colonel and president of the [Center for a New American Security](#), a nonpartisan military policy institution in Washington.

Under Army regulations, four-star generals must serve three years in that rank before they can keep it in retirement, but the president can waive the rule. General McChrystal was awarded his fourth star only last year, when he was made the top American and [NATO](#) commander in Afghanistan. He announced his plans to retire on Monday, five days after being fired.

The White House decision means that General McChrystal, 55, will receive 85 percent of the base pay of a four-star general with 34 years of active service, amounting to an annual pre-tax retirement income of \$181,416, according to Pentagon calculations. Had he retired as a three-star, the Pentagon said, General McChrystal would have received an annual pre-tax retirement income of \$160,068.

Colleagues said that General McChrystal, who has a grown son, had spent time with family in recent days in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. He has also been in contact by phone and e-mail with Defense Secretary [Robert M. Gates](#) and General Petraeus, who praised him this week not only for his service in Afghanistan but for his “exceptional leadership” in Iraq, where for five years General McChrystal oversaw secret commando operations and aggressively pushed his ranks to kill insurgents.

Colleagues say that they do not know yet what General McChrystal will do in retirement, but that his background suggests a future as a well-paid outside consultant to the Pentagon or a government intelligence agency. There is no word either on members of his personal staff who lost their jobs in the course of his firing, among them his executive officer, Col. Charles A. Flynn.

For the few months that it takes the general to go through the military's complicated process of retirement, he is expected to stay at Fort McNair, where he lives in a 200-year-old red-brick, white-columned Federal-style house on what is called General's Row. The view from the front porch, as General McChrystal used to tell guests, is of the field where the accomplices to [Abraham Lincoln](#)'s assassination were hanged; the view from the back is of one of the prime bass-fishing spots on the Potomac.

“Stan will land on both feet, make no mistake about that,” General Keane said. “But the psychological and emotional transition that he’s going through, so unexpectedly, from the responsibility he had as a wartime commander to what he’ll deal with in retirement, will just take time.”