

What Will We Have Left?

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The *Washington Post* broke the military's latest embarrassing story: three officers in one article, "Military Brass Behaving Badly."

At first glance, Army Veterans and active duty Soldiers - especially those who have served with Brig. Gen. Schweitzer - might shake our heads in disappointment (but not shame).

But *Washington Post* presents a grossly incongruous association of Schweitzer with the two other brigadiers highlighted in the same story - Brig. Gen. Bryan T. Roberts and Brig. Gen. David C. Uhrich.

To enrich the guilt-by-association effect, *WaPo* throws in a good dose of Petraeus, allusions to Navy's sex and bribery debacles, the Air Force's nuclear shenanigans, and other Army gropers.

But here's the real context:

Brig. Gen. Roberts allegedly engaged in a long-term adulterous affair that culminated with Roberts - get this - slapping the crap out of his lover and, then, viciously Mike-Tyson-style biting his girlfriend's lip, inflicting enough damage that she had to seek medical attention for the bleeding wound, and for her black eye, also allegedly inflicted by Roberts. That particular beating, though, was only one of three alleged beatings she endured at Roberts' hands.

So, with Roberts, if reports are accurate, we find a deeply troubled man who not only disregards military protocol by way of his affair but, as well, clearly suffers from some sort of serious psychological dysfunction manifested by way of the beating and biting.

Brig. Gen. Uhrich was, as well, allegedly engaged in a long-term adulterous affair and allegedly routinely drunk or, at least, imbibing on duty like Henry Blake on M*A*S*H* (Blake gets a buy, in my view, given his duties, the nut-jobs around him, and the brutality of the Korean War).

According to the *Post*, an "officer told investigators that 'if [Uhrich] did not have his alcohol, the wheels would come off" Worth notice is that Uhrich at least sought treatment for his apparent alcoholism, but the affair alone may be inexcusable under decisions of the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

So, with Uhrich, if reports are accurate, we see another troubled man, probably an alcoholic, with repeated and varied indiscretions that justifiably cause one to question his judgment and fitness to continue serving.

Petraeus, well, we all know that story.

Schweitzer: he fat-fingered out what was meant to be a private e-mail, in jest, that, as Schweitzer reportedly admits himself, represented poor judgment on his part: "My comments were a terrible attempt at humor. I

didn't mean them literally or figuratively, I simply meant them to try and be funny during a very tense period within the command to a limited audience. I know they were not appropriate. It was stupid.'"

Today, Brig. Gen. Schweitzer, undeniably one of The Army's most talented, experienced, wartime leaders is awaiting a call from the Secretary of the Army, who will decide Schweitzer's fate: accept already applied administrative action, or ask for Brig. Gen. Schweitzer's retirement.

The Secretary could accept the administrative action already taken by The Army in the matter - and on which Congresswoman Ellmers herself reportedly said, "'I am pleased with the corrective actions that are taking place and how they handled this very difficult situation'"

Or, the Secretary could ask Schweitzer to retire.

Schweitzer certainly committed an offense that The Army and the military doesn't really need right now: it's too busy wrangling up leaders with serious problems and professional shortcomings.

However, The Army must accept, as well, that if it forces Schweitzer to retire over this one relatively minor, though stupid, indiscretion, then, over time, we are not going to have much of an Army left when the bar is lowered that far.

Certainly, Schweitzer should not have joked around about an official matter in an e-mail.

But if the Nation, Congress, and the Pentagon believe that Soldiers - in contending with the day-to-day stresses of either combating the Taliban on multiple 15 month tours in Afghanistan or consistently working some 20 hours a day, 6-7 days a week, getting the troops ready for the next big deployment - are not going to periodically use profanity, in an e-mail or otherwise, or inadvertently make an inappropriate or injudicious comment here or there, then they are all fooling themselves and, what is more, establishing an impossible standard that even they do not and cannot meet.

Brig. Gen. Schweitzer is one of the most courageous, respected, intelligent, wartime experienced, ugly-looking, dog-soldier Infantryman in The Army's inventory. He is a foxhole fighter. A warrior. A leader. A human being.

Schweitzer's troops love him - guys and girls. His colleagues love him - guys and girls. He treats everyone the same - guys and girls - and demands accountability of all his troops, and himself, the same.

Our Army's best leaders request Schweitzer by name for the toughest, most grueling assignments when they need someone whose quiet sense of duty is inexorable and someone who will just not quit short of success.

Schweitzer can be a tough son-of-a-bitch and gruff as hell.

He's an American Infantry Soldier for God's sake.

And, he made a mistake uglier than even his own mug.

But to lump Schweitzer in with all the rest is simply misleading, a misrepresentation of the context of the facts and a misrepresentation of the man, nothing more than a matter of embellished guilt by association.

Hopefully, the Secretary of the Army will see that vivid distinction, be unmoved by the *Washington Post's* media maneuver, and let Schweitzer continue to serve his Nation at a time when we need Schweitzer's kind of experience and grit.
