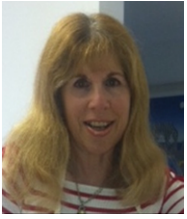


“A Tale of Two Heroes”

By Caren Besner



“Be sure you’re right. Then go ahead” – Will Rogers

This is a cautionary tale of two American soldiers. Nearly a century spans the incidents that brought them their notoriety; yet the issues they evoke are exactly the same and timeless. Does an active duty officer in the military have the right, a moral obligation even, to criticize the actions of his superiors; both military and civilian, if he firmly believes that those actions are incompetent and have dire consequences?

Our first soldier, William “Billy” Mitchell was born in December 1879 into a family of wealth and influence. He seemed a man destined for success. Opting for an army career, he became enamored of early developments in the field of aviation and joined the fledgling US Air Service; then a part of the Signal Corps. Following distinguished service in WWI, during which he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General, he continued to advocate for American air power during the lean post WWI years when military budgets were being slashed to the bare bone. Regarded as a visionary and a man way ahead of his time, Mitchell made a number of prophecies ... *all* of which eventually came true. Among other things, he foresaw the mass bombing of civilian population centers, airborne armies being dropped behind enemy lines, and the replacement of the battleship by the aircraft carrier as the dominant naval vessel. These ideas were all regarded as “crackpot” in the early 1920s, but yet, he continued to advocate for his cause, making many enemies as well as friends along the way. Mitchell’s undoing came in September 1925 when a Navy dirigible, the USS Shenandoah crashed during a severe

thunderstorm killing 14 men. The airship had been ordered aloft as a public relations gesture during a period of severe weather over the protestations of its own Captain. Mitchell offered his opinion on this and other incidents that had previously occurred: "These terrible accidents are the direct results of incompetency, criminal negligence and almost treasonable administration of the National Defense by the War and Navy Departments." This was the last straw for the army. He was charged with insubordination, court martialed, convicted, and suspended from duty for 5 years without pay. He chose to resign from the army and continued to espouse the cause of American air power but his time had passed. He died in 1936 in relative obscurity; 5 years before his most famous prediction came to pass. He could not have known when he wrote in 1924 that "One day Japan will seek to attack the United States through the Hawaiian Islands; some fine Sunday morning."

Fast forward to 2021, and another US military officer finds himself facing disciplinary action for asking his superiors to take responsibility for the fiasco that was the Afghan withdrawal. Marine Lieutenant-Colonel Stuart Scheller does not have the panache, public visibility or prophetic powers of Billy Mitchell. Nor does he appear to have any friends or admirers in high places. To date, he is the *only* serving officer in the entire US military to ask for some kind of accounting for the Afghanistan debacle. For having the audacity to question the competency of his superiors, both in the Pentagon and the federal government, he was relieved of his command and ordered to undergo psychiatric examination; as if the very act of asking a question rendered him mentally unfit. He is currently being held in a military brig, purportedly in solitary confinement, awaiting possible court martial.

Stuart Scheller is a 17-year combat veteran, having serviced multiple deployments. He was some 2 years away from being able

to collect his retirement benefits. He undertook those actions knowing full well what the consequences to himself and his family could be. Scheller did not have to speak out. He could have remained silent; soldiered on and kept his job. Had he embraced the "woke" ideology that seems to be pervasive in today's military he might have been on the fast track to wearing his own set of stars on the epaulets of his uniform. But Scheller is an honorable man; and the thought of acting in a "dishonorable" manner was repugnant to him.

It wasn't all that long ago when another military officer dared to question the actions of the Commander-in-Chief. Only this time, the President was Donald Trump. The officer in question was Army Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Vindman and the incident was Trump's supposed quid-pro-quo phone call to the Ukrainian President Zelenskiy; a transcript of which was furnished to the public. Both Vindman and Scheller violated the same military protocol but the treatment meted out to both was vastly different. Vindman was eventually relieved of his position on the National Security Council, but was not court martialed. Nor was he thrown in the brig in solitary confinement and ordered to undergo a mental evaluation. He was part of a special class of protected individuals known as "whistleblowers"; a designation that Stuart Scheller has been denied. Vindman retired on February 7, 2020 and became a hero to the Democrat party and mainstream media. Subsequently, he appeared in an ad for The Lincoln Project and the progressive group, Vote Vets, beseeching citizens to vote against Trump. One cannot help but wonder what Vindman would say about Biden's July 23, 2021 call to Afghan President Ghani, urging him to "project a different picture" about the situation in Afghanistan. The contrast in treatment between the two men could not be more glaring. Scheller's *real* crime was that he caused embarrassment to the Biden administration. This was especially galling since Joe Biden himself pronounced the Afghan withdrawal to be an "extraordinary success." For this heinous offense, Scheller must pay. He needs to be denigrated,

defamed, disparaged, and downgraded as an abject lesson to any serving officer who might be inclined to agree with him. Had his statements been made under the previous Trump administration, there is no doubt that he, like Vindman, would have been lauded as a national hero.

The American political landscape of today bears a scant resemblance to that which existed only a few short years ago. Our leaders now tell us that we must accept what they tell us with no questions allowed. Their allies in mainstream media and big tech censor any commentary which the ruling elites do not want us to hear. We must accept and obey or face dire consequences. Stuart Scheller found this out the hard way. As he sits in his cell awaiting his "day in court," he might be wondering what he could possibly say in his own defense. Billy Mitchell's defense during the 1925 proceedings was that he had spoken the truth; but truth today is defined as whatever the ruling class says it is and all branches of government, including the justice system, must be made to conform to the new standard. These are the hallmarks of a totalitarian state. Years ago, American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr once wrote: "Mans capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but mans inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary."

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E-Mail Caren Besner: greta1953@aol.com

[BIO: Caren Besner has written articles published by American Thinker, Conservative News and Views, The Front Page, Dr Swier, Renew America, Sun Sentinel, Published Reporter, Independent Sentinel, News With Views, The Moderate Voice, Canada Free Press, The Liberty Beacon, and others.]