

DAVID PETRAEUS: THE BESTEST GENERAL EVER SINCE GEORGE WASHINGTON

From what I've read, maybe about half of David Petraeus' boosters are shocked about his plea deal – not so much that he pled guilty to a crime, I think, but the details about the kinds of sensitive materials he stored in a rucksack then passed on to his mistress. Perhaps, too, a few of them have qualms about a top official lying to the FBI (apparently unaware that Petraeus has been lying for years).

So the result has been that, even with a posse of PR hacks in the waiting, the response to his plea has been relatively muted.

Of course, that creates a problem for the people for whom Petraeus has been a necessary myth for years, a heroic biography on which to hang a narrative of benign conquest.

Enter Michael O'Hanlon.

It's not so much that I'm surprised O'Hanlon has written this sappy hagiography. That's what O'Hanlon does.

I'm amused with O'Hanlon's failure to explain why he has chosen to write such a hagiography *now*, just after we've learned Petraeus was willing to compromise some of America's most sensitive secrets to get laid, and then lied about it. "David Petraeus, National Hero" the title reads, followed by the sub-head, "His openness was his downfall."

Fucking in private in exchange for sharing code word intelligence is "openness"?

But O'Hanlon probably didn't even write that. If not, then the only hint in O'Hanlon's slop of Petraeus' betrayal of vows that the General was

hailing even as he was lying about breaking his own is in his admission that, Petraeus “has just taken another hit in recent days,” as if getting special treatment for crimes others do decades in prison for is akin to the two incidents were Petraeus almost died that O’Hanlon has just lionized, though neither incident happened in combat.

I’m more amused than shocked by the way O’Hanlon tries to turn shrink-wrapping helicopters into a sexually charged act.

Petraeus wanted to talk mostly about shrink-wrapping helicopters. He knew that he might have to move the 101st Air Assault Division by train from Fort Campbell, Kentucky to the Atlantic seaboard in preparation for possible deployment to Iraq. We didn’t talk a lot about the high politics or military practicalities of an actual invasion in that conversation. You know the old saying, generals think logistics! And that is exactly where his mind was.

David Petraeus and your local UPS guy. “That’s logistics.”

Though I would have thought calling David Petraeus the best General since George Washington a little over the top, even for O’Hanlon.

To my mind, what he did in Iraq was probably the greatest complex accomplishment by any American general since Washington in the Revolutionary War. Sure, I’m biased, and sure, the stakes for the nation were lower in Iraq than in the world wars or Civil War and the achievements less durable in the face of future events. And for hardship in the field, those generals of earlier days usually had it much worse.

But in the need to combine knowledge of maneuver warfare, required for the

taking-down of Saddam back in 2003, to the reinvigoration and refinement of proper counterinsurgency operations that Petraeus led in the field in 2007 (after writing the U.S. military's manual on the subject with Marine Corps Lt. Gen. James Amos, the future Commandant, in 2006), to the mastery of Iraqi tribal and regional and national politics needed to bring all the pieces of the team together, to the handling of the Washington debate, there was something different about this war. It was simply more complicated, with more moving parts, and more things that had to go right to have any chance of success.

O'Hanlon's conclusion, after imbuing Petraeus and his team of heroes with some great act in taking out Saddam and then managing the occupation well enough that it might have "any chance of success" is notable. Because this is where O'Hanlon ends this embarrassing project:

This dream team refashioned the Iraqi Security Forces and their leadership, then worked with them to bring down violence rates in Iraq an incredible 90 percent and give Iraqi leaders a chance to turn their country around. That change, tragically, was largely squandered in ensuing years, but Petraeus and Crocker et al gave them the chance. On balance, this was arguably the greatest military comeback in American history, after four successive years of losing the war.

The greatest military comeback in American history, according to Michael O'Hanlon, came when the same military leaders who had been losing that war for four successive years decided to bribe enough Sunnis so America could make a break for it and claim victory, a victory the lie of which was exposed when those same "refashioned Iraqi Security Forces and their

leadership” turned and ran when faced by Iraq’s former officers teamed up with some of those same Sunnis now claiming radical Islamic sanction.

The greatness of America for the COINdinistas is now being hung on the claim that a General whose commitment to his vows (to secrecy, to say nothing of his own marriage) couldn’t withstand the promise of a good lay. And that General’s triumph is now measured in utter silence about the crimes for which he’ll go scot free, and in celebration for his ability to shrink wrap (or have shrink wrapped) helicopters and – after 4 years of losing – giving those we occupied “a chance.”

And this, to the COINdinistas, is the greatest accomplishment since Washington’s successful revolt against our own occupier Empire gave us, our idealized nation, far far more than “a chance.”