

Consummate Professionals

This is a follow-up on a previous post concerning the meeting with the generals and admirals. I'd put this in the file labeled "What most regular folks probably don't know."

I spent the final 11 years of my military career serving in major headquarters of the Army, first at the European Headquarters in Heidelberg, Germany, then at and around the Pentagon. I interfaced directly with dozens of "Flag Officers," the military vernacular for generals and admirals. Individually and as a group, these were some of the most intelligent men and women I've ever had the pleasure to know and work with. You might not be aware that every flag officer must be a college graduate, but it's also the case that each has earned at least one Masters degree, many hold multiple advanced degrees. There might be exceptions to this, but they would be rare. Each one has also completed a regimen of progressively more intense military education programs focused on leadership, strategic and tactical thinking, corporate/organizational behavior and relationships, the law of land and sea warfare, and a "charm school" to prepare them for the political and civil aspects of senior leadership.

The officers you saw pictured at that gathering in Quantico are exceptional, often brilliant, people. The year each of them entered the service, they were just one among about 14,000 other new officers across all branches of service. From that year-group of new junior officers, maybe 25 eventually rose to the rank of general or admiral, that's around 0.2% if you're counting. This wasn't a case of winning the lottery. One doesn't "get lucky" and "wins" a star. Each and every officer selected to flag rank EARNs that status. It isn't handed to them by a political or corporate benefactor, either. These officers are selected by a board of other flag officers, their military peers, who are familiar with their military records and intent on elevating only the best to flag rank. I was the personnel policy officer for the Army Chaplaincy for several years and responsible for setting up promotion selection boards for Army chaplains. I know how the process works. Only the best-of-the-best emerges from the process.

So, put yourself in the position of one of those flag officers in the auditorium at Quantico. You had to listen to the unhinged rantings of two men, one elected and one appointed to positions of seniority that, by the Constitution that you have sworn to protect and defend, who are your civilian overseers. You have more leadership experience, more education, more emotional intelligence, exponentially more military experience, and more common sense than both of them combined, but you must endure their berating tirade, their nonsensical blustering, and their unethical challenge to pledge fealty or suffer the consequences. Only your professionalism and well-ingrained discipline prevent you from

reacting. What do you think these military men and women, our most senior and most seasoned military leaders, are, themselves, thinking? What is “the take-away” for them? Confidence or dread? And, if/when it comes to “It,” and the President orders “It,” and the Generals say, “No!”, where will we stand?

Michael T. “Terry” Bradfield
Winchester, Virginia
October 2025