

HYPER-LINKED IMAGES: THE GEN. PATRAEUS CASE



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Opinion--Against Gen. David Petraeus A Phony Hero for a Phony War

By Lucian K. Truscott IV

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FASTIDIOUSNESS is never a good sign in a general officer. Though strutting military peacocks go back to Alexander's time, our first was MacArthur, who seemed at times to care more about how much gold braid decorated the brim of his cap than he did about how many bodies he left on beachheads across the Pacific. Next came Westmoreland, with his starched fatigues in Vietnam.

In our time, Gen. David H. Petraeus has set the bar high.

Never has so much beribboned finery decorated a general's uniform since Al Haig passed through the sally ports of West Point on his way to the White House.



**Illustration by Sean McCabe; Photograph of Gen. David H. Petraeus
by David J. Phillip/Associated Press**

“What’s wrong with a general looking good?” you may wonder. I would propose that every moment a general spends on his uniform jacket is a moment he’s not doing his job, which is supposed to be leading soldiers in combat and winning wars — something we, and our generals, stopped doing about the time that General MacArthur gold-braided his way around the stalemated Korean War.

And now comes “Dave” Petraeus, and the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. No matter how good he looked in his biographer-mistress’s book, it doesn’t make up for the fact that we failed to conquer the countries we invaded, and ended up occupying undefeated nations.

The genius of General Petraeus was to recognize early on that the war he had been sent to fight in Iraq wasn’t a real war at all. This is what the public and the news media — lamenting the fall of the brilliant hero undone by a tawdry affair — have failed to see. He wasn’t the military magician portrayed in the press; he was a self-constructed hologram, emitting an aura of preening heroism for the ever eager cameras.

I spent part of the fall of 2003 with General Petraeus and the 101st Airborne Division in and around Mosul, Iraq. One of the first questions I asked him was what his orders had been. Was he ordered to “take Mosul,” I asked. No answer. How about “Find Mosul and report back”? No answer. Finally I asked him if his orders were something along the lines of “Go to Mosul!” He gave me an almost imperceptible nod. It must have been the first time an American combat infantry division had been ordered into battle so casually.

General Petraeus is very, very clever, which is quite different from stating that he is the brilliant tactician he has been described as. He figured if he hadn’t actually been given the mission to “win” the “war” he found himself in, he could at least look good in the meantime. And the truth is he did a lot of good things, like conceiving of the idea of basically buying the loyalties of various factions in Iraq. But they weren’t the kinds of things that win wars. In fact, they were the kinds of things that prolong wars, which for the general had the useful side effect of putting

him on ever grander stages so he could be seen doing ever grander things, culminating in his appointment last year as the director of the C.I.A.

The thing [General Petraeus] learned to do better than anything else was present the image of The Man You Turn To When Things Get Tough. (Who can forget the Newsweek cover, "[Can This Man Save Iraq?](#)" with a photo of General Petraeus looking very Princeton-educated in his Westy-starved fatigues?) He was so good at it that he conned the news media into thinking he was the most remarkable general officer in the last 40 years, and, by playing hard to get, he conned the political establishment into thinking that he could morph into Ike Part Due and might one day be persuaded to lead a moribund political party back to the White House.

THE problem was that he hadn't led his own Army to win anything even approximating a victory in either Iraq or Afghanistan. It's not just General Petraeus. The fact is that none of our generals have led us to a victory since men like Patton and my grandfather, Lucian King Truscott Jr., stormed the beaches of North Africa and southern France with blood in their eyes and military murder on their minds.

Those generals, in my humble opinion, were nearly psychotic in their drive to kill enemy soldiers and subjugate enemy nations. Thankfully, we will probably never have cause to go back to those blood-soaked days. But we still shouldn't allow our military establishment to give us one generation after another of imitation generals who pretend to greatness on talk shows and photo spreads, jetting around the world in military-spec business jets.

The generals who won World War II were the kind of men who, as it was said at the time, chewed nails for breakfast, spit tacks at lunch and picked their teeth with their pistol barrels.

General Petraeus probably flosses. He didn't chew nails and spit tacks, but rather challenged privates to push-up contests and went out on five-mile reveille runs with biographers. His greatest accomplishment was merely personal: **he transformed himself from an intellectual nerd into a rock star military man.** The problem was that he got so lost among his hangers-on and handlers and roadies and groupies that he finally had his head turned by a West Point babe in a sleeveless top.

If only our political leadership, not to mention the Iraqi and Afghan insurgencies, had known how quickly and hard he would fall over such a petty, ignominious affair. Think of how many tens of thousands of lives could have been saved by ending those conflicts much earlier and sending Dave and his merry band of Doonesbury generals to the showers.

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Who's who--Interactive Gen. Petraeus Scandal

<http://graphics.latimes.com/towergraphic-general-petraeus-scandal-whos-who/>

Op-Ed Columnist—Pro Gen David Petraeus Hacking General Petraeus This is not going to end well for the F.B.I.

By Joe Nocera
New York Times
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<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/17/opinion/nocera-hacking-general-petraeus.html?ref=sunday>

We are now entering the second phase of [the David Petraeus scandal](#).

The first phase began on Nov. 9 when Petraeus revealed that he had had an affair [and resigned as C.I.A. director](#). For the next week, the press scrambled to keep abreast of every head-spinning new plot twist. General Petraeus slept with *whom*? [Jill Kelley](#) did *what*? Petraeus's biographer/mistress [titled her book](#) *what*?

Phase 1 of any big national scandal ends when the New York tabloids stop writing their laugh-out-loud cover headlines (“[Cloak and Shag Her](#)” screamed The New York Post) and relegate the story to the inside pages.

That happened on Friday.

In Phase 2, people begin to grapple with the scandal's larger meaning, assuming, of course, that it has some larger meaning. The sordid John Edwards affair, for instance, showed that he had never been fit for public office, much less the vice presidency. The Bernie Madoff scandal showed that investors will happily suspend disbelief when their fund manager's [rates of profits for investors] are too good to be true.

But the Petraeus scandal could well end up teaching some very different lessons. If the most admired military man in a generation can have his e-mail hacked by F.B.I. agents, then none of us are safe from the post-9/11 surveillance machine. And if an affair is all it takes to force such a man from office, then we truly have lost all sense of proportion.

Let's go back to the scene of the so-called crime, to Tampa, Fla., where Kelley, an attractive wannabe socialite, gets some unsettling e-mails from an anonymous sender. If she had any sense, she would block the e-mail address and be done with it.

But because [Kelly] knows that men will bend the rules for her — after all, high-ranking military officers [granted her unfettered access](#) to [MacDill Air Force Base](#) — she goes to [her \(male\) F.B.I. friend](#), who advocates with his superiors for an investigation. They agree.

But on what grounds? I looked up the cyber-stalking statute. It says that a crime has been committed when e-mail “causes substantial emotion distress” or places the victim in “reasonable fear of death or serious bodily injury.”

This strikes me as a pretty high standard. It is possible, I suppose, that the anonymous e-mails Kelley was getting from Paula Broadwell, Petraeus's former mistress, met that standard. And [the F.B.I. has worked hard](#) to make Broadwell's e-mails sound as threatening as possible. But once they leak out, as they surely will, I strongly suspect that we'll see that the law was just a fig leaf.

So, too, with the “classified information” Broadwell is supposed to have. (And didn't you love [the F.B.I.'s big show of carting away her computers?](#))

Given the government's propensity, since 9/11, to stamp “classified” on every piece of paper short of the paper towels in the commissary, my guess is that this claim is also going to turn out to be less than earth-shattering. Once the F.B.I. learned the truth — that it was just about sex — it needed a high-minded rationale to keep snooping. Broadwell did the F.B.I. a huge favor by leaving “classified” information on her computer.

I understand why Petraeus felt he needed to resign; the affair had violated his own code of honor. I also understand that [his propensity for publicity](#) and control made him unpopular among the C.I.A. rank-and-file. But I still wish President Obama had refused his request to resign.

I wish the president had said that although General Petraeus had made a mistake in his personal life — an all-too-human mistake, made by millions of people every day — the consequences of that mistake should be dealt with by him, his wife and his former lover. I wish he had said that the affair should not trump his decades of public service, or stop him from continuing to serve. I wish he had said that the Justice Department's inspector general was going to conduct an inquiry into whether the F.B.I. had acted appropriately in handling Kelley's complaint.

On MSNBC on Friday afternoon, Andrea Mitchell spoke to Senator Roy Blunt, a Republican from Missouri, who had just come from a closed-door Intelligence Committee meeting where Petraeus had testified.

“Do you think he had to resign?” she asked.

“Based on what I know, I wouldn't think so,” [Blunt replied](#). “Clearly,” he added, “this is not someone who is going to be subject to blackmail.” Thus did Blunt swat away the one legitimate rationale for forcing Petraeus from his job because of his affair.

In the weeks to come, a lot more people are going to come to the same conclusion — and are going to ask the same questions about the ease with which the government can look at our e-mails and peep into our bedrooms. Such a rethinking is long overdue.

The Petraeus affair: unscripted and simply scandalous Secrets, security, sex and socialites. The Petraeus affair plays like a TV reality show — and we're all hooked.

*By Mary McNamara, Television Critic
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It's "Homeland" meets "The Real Housewives" — and it's hands down the best serialized show on TV.

It's "Dallas" in military drag, in which a ridiculously retro social order (who knew that "socialites" and "hostesses" even existed anymore, never mind in Tampa) slams into the high-tech world of cyberstalking — only to reveal a story as old as the written word: The Case of the Compromising Love Letter.

GRAPHIC: Who's who | Gen. Petraeus Scandal

Honestly, when will cheating couples finally learn to keep their declarations of passion out of anything that could conceivably be stolen by a lady's maid, discovered by a suspicious spouse or unearthed by a cyber sleuth? Never, one hopes, or much of the world's great literature, not to mention detective fiction, would collapse.

Stripped to its essentials, the Petraeus affair is a familiar enough narrative: Married man in power falls for a wide-eyed, admiring acolyte to the detriment of career, family and reputation. Happens all the time, or at least every six months or so — Clinton, Edwards, Sanford, Schwarzenegger, just to name a few. But it's the brushwork that makes the masterpiece, and the details of the Petraeus scandal transfix the eye each and every time a new one is revealed.

First there's the man himself, square-jawed, yes, but not terribly handsome, with those protruding ears and that receding hairline, still radiating competence nonetheless and more than that, a Middle American super-dad decency that almost belies his four-star status. Then there's Paula Broadwell, the Harvard-educated biographer whose book was so unapologetically gushing that Jon Stewart, interviewing her before the scandal broke, asked her if David H. Petraeus was "awesome or incredibly awesome."

And, oh, the shivery meta-media pleasure of watching Stewart now review those softball questions knowing what we/he knows now, or finding the whole original extended-version episode in which Broadwell banters with her cuckolded husband as they do his and her sets of push-ups for charity.

Still, if the narrative had been confined to Petraeus and Broadwell, even with his universally beloved status and his resignation mere days after a contentious election, the nation might simply have shared a raised-eyebrow pause and moved on.

PHOTOS: Love triangles of TV and film

But then we met Honorary Counsel Jill Kelley and there was no turning back.

It's one thing for the head of the CIA to have an affair, even with a woman crazy enough to send anonymous emails to someone she perceives to be a rival; it's another to learn that powerful generals regularly hang out with a woman who looks like she could go six rounds with NeNe Leakes. It was Kelley and her strange nexus of irritation and influence that lifted the Petraeus scandal out of the ho-hum arrogance/stupidity of men who think they will never get caught and the women who love them.

Reading descriptions of Kelley's champagne and caviar parties, her Gasparilla Pirate Fest parties and sky diving with the troops, it is difficult not to envision a Lebanese American version of Joan Collins in "Dynasty" or perhaps Madeleine Stowe in "Revenge," the grasping, scheming lovely who everyone instantly sees through, except whichever schmuck she happens to be making a play for at the time.

Who, in this case, appears to have included some of the military's top male brass — trained intelligence officers who supposedly are able to spot a potential terrorist across a crowded room but who, apparently, don't know a nakedly ambitious social climber when they're posin' for pictures with her.

This is why we cannot get enough of the Petraeus story: It has something for everyone. A fallen hero, a troubled smart girl, a cast of characters who seem destined for the Bravo or Lifetime. (What am I bid on the potential for Jill Kelley announcing a reality project in the near future? She has an identical twin for heaven's sake!)

But it's more than the story's multiple narrative touchstones that compel us. There is something heartbreaking about it being Petraeus, who, unlike Clinton or Edwards or our former governor, has not cultivated a noticeable sexual swagger or a million-dollar smile.

So he must have, we imagine, simply fallen in love. And for all our carefully nurtured cynicism, our tales of the sexting and hook-up generation, we remain a nation in love with love, particularly forbidden love.

PHOTOS: Hollywood love triangles

Our books, our films, our television series steer us again and again to the thundering, fatal majesty of a love that makes all other concerns — jobs, friends, the respect of peers — superfluous.

It's no accident that two of the winter's biggest films are the final "Twilight" and "Anna Karenina," in which, spoiler alert, people actually die for love.

In real life, similar choices often lead to climaxes far less romantic, denouements much bleaker, like the grimy napkin-littered space of a trendy dance club in the unforgiving light of midmorning. Petraeus reminds us, once again, that the choices we make, even when seeking the magic of the moment, have consequences.

And in a country with laws and mores still beholden to our Puritan founders, the only thing we like better than a good, juicy, twisty love story is a good, juicy, twisty love story with a moral at the end.

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