

# *Excerpts from Dereliction of Duty*

by

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## **Chapter Four Fear and Loathing**

Another shortcoming was dishonesty—not just about golf and extramarital affairs but also about our national security. Such dishonesty said much about the president’s priorities. On August 26, 1996, just three months into my tenure, I was accompanying the president in Toledo, Ohio, on one of his many reelection campaign events. I listened to his speech from one of the “hold” rooms offstage. Television images and sound were piped into the room by the White House Communications Agency. I heard President Clinton say, “For the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age, on this beautiful night, there is not a single nuclear missile pointed at a child in the United States of America.”<sup>2</sup>

I looked down at the black satchel at my side. “What?” I mumbled out loud. I turned to the military White House doctor along on the trip and asked him, “Did he just say what I think he said?” The doctor shrugged and nodded. It was patently untrue, and anyone with a remote knowledge of military and foreign affairs knew it was untrue.

There were missiles clearly pointed at us and we were pointing missiles at others. The military aides had briefed the president annually on the specifics, and I was carrying the satchel full of the details. That autumn, I heard him deliver the line in speeches again and again and again. President Clinton made this claim more than 130 times during the 1996 reelection campaign alone.<sup>3</sup> It left me slack-jawed that one of his major campaign themes could be such an obvious, whopping lie.

I had heard rumors about the president conducting an illicit affair with a young intern. I’d even seen the intern once or twice, and asked a colleague what she was doing in the West Wing. I was told to leave it alone. Now I knew why.

Kris motioned me into the Oval Office. Clinton was seated behind his desk. He looked tired and beaten, blanched and swollen. He looked up at me from behind his reading glasses. “Sir, if you’d like, we can just change out the codes now and I’ll come back for the briefing later.”

“That’d be fine, Buzz. Thank you.”

I handed him the new card—the biscuit, we called it—with the new codes, which would be effective immediately. One of the most important symbols of military power in the history of man had just exchanged hands. He looked back down at his desk and the morning newspapers piled in front of him. I was waiting for him to respond in kind. He didn’t offer me his old set of codes, however, and I figured now was not a good time to press the issue. I showed myself out of the office and returned to the East Wing.

After the Lewinsky affair broke, the senior staff tried to insulate the president from further problems. Their intent was to keep him “safe” from women. With the president’s help,

the staff developed a code word for attractive females: they called them “security risks.” In my opinion, they weren’t the only “security risks.”

The biggest security risk was the president himself.

When one of the other military aides and I returned, a few days later, to brief the president on changes to the contents—and the launch codes—of the football, we were in for a surprise. We arrived at the Oval Office as scheduled. My military-aide compatriot briefed the president on the important changes. My expectation was that the president would finally return his old set to us. Instead, President Clinton looked up sheepishly and confessed, “I don’t have mine on me. I’ll track it down, guys, and get it back to you.”

We were dumbfounded—the president losing his nuclear codes. He is required to have the codes on him at all times. President Clinton normally kept the world’s most sensitive document rubber-banded to his credit cards in his pants pocket.

There had been one other time that he had misplaced the codes, but we were able to quickly track them down through his valets. He’d left them in the White House residence while he was leaving for a round of golf. This time, though, the codes were apparently lost.

The president finally threw up his hands and said casually, “I just can’t find it...don’t know where it is.” As far as he was concerned, that was the end of the story; Podesta and Lindsey’s overriding concern was that the story might leak to the press. Only the military seemed remotely worried about the national security implications of the nuclear launch codes’ being lost. And they were never found.

## **Chapter 7**

### **The War on Terrorism**

THE WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM was buzzing. It was fall 1998 and the National Security Council (NSC) and the “intelligence community” were tracking the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden, the shadowy mastermind of terrorist attacks on American targets overseas. “They’ve successfully triangulated his location,” yelled a “Sit Room” watch stander. “We’ve got him.”

Beneath the West Wing of the White House, behind a vaulted steel door, the Sit Room staff sprang into action. The watch officer notified National Security Advisor Sandy Berger, “Sir, we’ve located bin Laden. We have a two-hour window to strike.”

Characteristic of the Clinton administration, the weapons of choice would be Tomahawk missiles. No clandestine “snatch” by our Special Operations Forces. No penetrating bombers or high-speed fighter aircraft flown by our Air Force and Navy forces. No risk of losing American lives.

Berger ambled down the stairwell and entered the Sit Room. He picked up the phone at one of the busy controller consoles and called the president. Amazingly, President Clinton was not available. Berger tried again and again. Bin Laden was within striking distance. The window of opportunity was closing fast. The plan of attack was set and the Tomahawk crews were ready. For about an hour Berger couldn’t get the commander in chief on the line. Though the president was always accompanied by military aides and the Secret Service, he was somehow unavailable. Berger stalked the Sit Room, anxious and impatient.

Finally, the president accepted Berger’s call. There was discussion, there were pauses—and no decision. The president wanted to talk with his secretaries of defense and state. He wanted to study the issue further. Berger was forced to wait. The clock was ticking. The president eventually called back. He was still indecisive. He wanted more discussion. Berger alternated between phone calls and watching the clock.

The NSC watch officer was convinced we had the right target. The intelligence sources were conclusive. The president, however, wanted a guaranteed hit or nothing at all. This time, it was nothing at all. We didn’t pull the trigger. We “studied” the issue until it was too late—the window of opportunity closed. Al-Qaeda’s spiritual and organizational leader slipped through the noose.

The Clinton administration never responded decisively, even when given the opportunity, as it was obliged to do, with its own "war against terrorism." If we had a national interest in sending troops to Haiti and Rwanda, certainly the Clinton administration had an obligation in the name of our national security to deploy and use the military resources necessary to deal with al-Qaeda as its deadly presence became known and its declared war on America became public and costly. That it did not respond is a consequence for which the Clinton administration is, in my view, extremely culpable. By failing to answer the threat as it should have, the Clinton administration was guilty of gross negligence and dereliction of duty to the safety of our country, which the president was sworn to defend.

Compare this with the decisive reactions to fight terrorism under President Reagan. On October 8, 1985, a group of Palestinian terrorists seized the Italian luxury liner Achille Lauro off the coast of Alexandria, Egypt. The terrorists were seeking the release of Palestinian prisoners being held by Israel. In the course of their hijacking, they would kill an American, sixty-nine-year-old Leon Klinghoffer.

The direction from the White House down to the Pentagon and on to the operational units was swift and clear. Within a few hours, I received a phone call at home, quickly packed for an unknown period of time and destination, and was flying a C-141 from Charleston Air Force Base, South Carolina, to pick up members of the First Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta, as it was known then, or Delta Force.

We flew nonstop to Sigonella Naval Air Station in Sicily and set up operations for the potential interdiction and seizure of the ship. The rapidity and strength of executive decision-making found refuge in the heart of every airman and soldier involved. There was no question as to our intent or conviction.

The terrorists left the boat under safe haven provided by Egypt two days later and boarded an Egyptian airliner bound for the sanctity of Tunisia. On October 11, U. S. Navy F-14 jets intercepted the airliner and forced it to land at Sigonella. Members of the Delta Force poured from a following C-141, surrounded the jet, and quickly took the terrorists into captivity. In all, three days from presidential directive to successful outcome.

## **Chapter Four Fear and Loathing**

"In the fall of 1997, I received a phone call in my office from Lieutenant Colonel Mark Donnelly, commander of the Presidential Pilot Office... 'One of my female stewards claims she was approached and touched inappropriately by President Clinton.'" p. 86

"The sum total of [the Clinton administration's] knowledge of the military seemed to come from movies and from the antiwar movement of the 1960s and 1970s... they place no value on what the military did. The military, in their view, was simply an administration lackey." p. 87

"No one in the White House really understood the importance of esprit de corps or unit cohesion, or even how sending men and women into danger zones where the bullets fly needs to be done with a seriousness and sobriety of purpose that takes into account the risks and the costs." p. 90

"At events where the national anthem was played, [Clinton] kept his arms dangling by his sides instead of resting his hand over his heart. The message, intended or not, came through loud and clear to the military: Bill Clinton and his administration knew nothing, and cared less, about the military." p. 91

## **Chapter 5 National Defense or Social Petri Dish?**

"For the Clintons and their senior staff, the military was a social-service project. It had been transformed in a few short years from an instrument of national defense to an armed social-work agency. It existed for whatever ends this administration might have in mind." p. 98

"Military readiness and effectiveness took a backseat in the Clinton administration to forced social engineering... forced sex integration, coed training, [and] 'dual' fitness standards." p. 104

"When Vice President Al Gore was given the task of 'reinventing government,' he and the White House took credit for removing 305,000 people from government payroll. What they didn't tell you was that 286,000 of those cuts-- more than 90 percent-- came from employees of the Department of Defense." p. 106