Lessons from the Commodore

Description

If Bill Clinton had had this lecture, he wouldnâ€™t have needed to risk the freedom of Sandy Bergerâ€¦.

We know Sandy accidentally stuffed his pants and socks with National secrets, just before the 9-11 Hearings. When I saw this quoted email from Buzz Patterson, author of â€œDereliction of Dutyâ€• (a fine read, by the way), and Buzzâ€™s remarks about it wasnâ€™t about the documents themselves, but the handwritten notes on the margins. He is so correct. We can only surmise why the followers of Clinton didnâ€™t want that on the street.

It was back in 1987, and we had returned from a major fleet exercise a few days before. While we had been at sea, there was a change of command, and the incoming commodore of our destroyer squadron was Capt Joe Lopez. It was our first time back in the office (somewhere we didnâ€™t get to visit very often) and he walked out of his office, holding a naval message in his hand. Since we were still feeling him out, and he us, it got quiet.

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What Joe Lopez said next has stuck with me since that day. It went something like this:

â€œGentlemen, we may make our jokes and derogatory comments about the units we work with at times, but those things should be kept among us.â€• He held the message up facing us, and there were some handwritten remarks in the margins. He didnâ€™t tell us what it was, but in this context, that wasnâ€™t important.

â€œWe have people from our units and other places that come in here regularly to meet with us. How would you feel if you walked in here, as one of the shipâ€™s company of a unit of ours, and saw something about your ship written on a message sitting on one of the desks in here?â€•

â€œIf something needs to be written on a document, make it factual and professional. That way, youâ€™ll never be called upon to explain something you regret writing.â€•

He didnâ€™t have to say any more, the point was quickly grasped.

Category

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