

9/11 enraged and pained me like all Americans. But unlike many of my peers, the events of 9/11 aren't what compelled me to join the military. For me, I found myself working as an accountant in a cubical post college. From my cubical one day in 2004, I was able to watch the Marines moving through the city of Fallujah on the news. At the center of this violent attack, was the unit V18. Watching those Marines filled me with awe, respect, and love. I knew how much I loved America, and I was mad at myself for not making more sacrifices for the country. I called the Marine Corps that day and began my journey.

After 17 years, I want to express how grateful I am for everything the Marine Corps did to mold me into the man I am. Despite the recent events, I owe the Marine Corps a lot.

The Marine Corps for me was never supposed to be a career. But I've stayed as long as I have for two reasons:

1. Love for the Marines and
2. The opportunity to make a difference on the battlefield as a leader.

I truly believe America is the greatest country in the world. I truly believe the American military is the greatest military in the world.

I truly believe the Marine Corps has the best talent of all the military services.

But I also truly believe fundamental change needs to occur in the military. I observed that the General officers were unable or unwilling to hold themselves accountable.

I have always loved the Marines. But as my recent public comments illustrate, I started questioning the long-standing system of the Marine Corps, and for that matter, the military as a whole.

Prior to the withdraw of Afghanistan, I was reflecting on the often-told stories about the previous Commandants Wilson and Barrow. Those two Commandants led the USMC after the failures in Vietnam. The narrative told today is that Commandants Wilson and Barrow “fixed the service” with their generational shift. They fixed the Service by raising the standards on the junior enlisted Marine. Said another way, the junior enlisted Marines weren’t capable of winning the Vietnam war, or the next war, so the Generals needed to fix the Service. The only officers held accountable for the My Lai massacre were company grade officers. Not a single General Officer was held accountable for any failures in Vietnam. Sound familiar?

I was thinking about the parallels of Vietnam and Afghanistan as I read General Berger’s letter to the Force dated 18 August. This letter in my opinion perfectly illustrated senior military leader’s inability to see the true pain in Service members following a failed war effort. General Berger told Service members their sacrifices were worth it without offering any connection back to a bigger purpose. He concluded the letter with how Service members should go seek counseling. At no point did he acknowledge any failures of the leadership.

A week after reading his statement, I was sitting in my office on August 26th, and I was told that 13 service members had been killed and many more injured in an SVEST attack. I also knew the majority of the casualties were from V18... my first unit. My mind was immediately taken back to my friend Dave Borden, who was hit with an SVEST when we served in Ramadi together with V18. It was the same situation playing out again. I thought about all the time I spent with Dave in Walter Reed, and in the half-way treatment house months later. I thought about LCpl Gluff who was killed in that SVEST attack next to Dave. And at the same time as these thoughts ran through my mind, I was receiving pictures from a friend on my phone from Marines who were involved in the recent Abby Gate Afghanistan SVEST incident.

In that moment I had clarity. I realized the military was continuing to make the same mistakes because senior leaders continued to diagnose the wrong problem. I concluded that our senior leaders were either unable or unwilling to have an honest discussion about our failures in a public forum that would necessitate REAL change. I also decided that quietly addressing these concerns within the chain of command would be ineffective. I knew my complaints would never be heard by the Commandant, the SECDEF, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, or the American people if I went through the proper channels. Reference the charges I tried to prefer against General McKenzie. It is a perfect example of how going through the system doesn't work.

In the first video I connected the failed Afghan withdraw, the attacks on V18, and General Berger's letter to the force. I stated, "The reason people are so upset right now is NOT because of the Marine on the battlefield. That Service member has always rose to the occasion and done extraordinary things. The reason people are so upset right now is because their senior leaders let them down, and none of them are raising their hands and taking accountability." I ended by saying, "I've been fighting for 17 years and I'm willing to throw it all away to say to my senior leaders... I demand accountability."

That Thursday night, as the video started to go viral, I stated on my LinkedIn page that I did not plan to resign despite all the demands for my resignation. At that time, that is how I felt. I wanted to remain in the Marine Corps.

When I came into work the next morning, on August 27th, the first person I spoke to was Col Emmel. He asked what I was trying to achieve with the video. He told me he didn't think I would be able to affect any real change. He then told me that morning that I would NOT be relieved immediately. He told me to go home for the weekend and an investigation would take place, and that following the investigation the command would decide if it warranted my relief and/or follow-on administrative action.

When Col Emmel left my office, my Battalion Executive Officer came in so we could conduct a turnover. He was going to run the Battalion in my absence. He said, "I don't need anything

from you sir. I just want you to know how much I respect you, and how political and fucked up the Marine Corps has gotten. That's why a lot of guys are getting out. That's why our old Gunner got out. In fact, I first heard about your video when our old Gunner called me this morning. He said, your new boss just posted a video that is all truth. I'm sure he's going down, but someone needed to have the courage to say it. Please tell him how proud we all are of him." My Battalion Executive Officer then went on to say, "We all know it's political. You know the joint chiefs who signed a letter condemning the January 6th attacks... how political was that? I'm not saying I condone the January 6th attacks, but I am saying for all the joint chiefs to sign a letter on that topic, but not to condemn any of the other recent riots that have caused more damage and deaths is purely political." To which I responded... "Yes, those idiots on January 6th were unorganized and unintelligent. If ever there was a force that used deliberate thought, the outcome could be much worse."

At no time did I ever advocate for the violent overthrow of the government. I was led into the conversation of the January 6th attacks by someone I trusted, and then my words were twisted. Furthermore, the investigating officer then took that statement and led every witness he interviewed with questions about my involvement in the January 6th attacks. This in my perception, was as an attempt by the Marine Corps to paint me into something I'm not. The Marine Corps, despite their best efforts, was not able to find any evidence of insurrection. If the

Marine Corps could have charged me with insurrection... they would have.

Then later that same Friday the 27th, while I was back at my house, without explanation, Col Emmel called me back into work, even though he told me to take the weekend off. When I came back into work, he relieved me for cause. He never explained why he did a 180, and I didn't ask. I'm not sure if it was my Battalion Executive Officer's comments, or a decision made above Col Emmel. But at the time, not even understanding what my Battalion Executive Officer had said, I agreed that the relief was best for the Marine Corps. And I wanted, and still want, what was best for the Marine Corps. When I left work, I made a post stating that I had been relieved, "and that my command was doing exactly what I would have done." After publicly announcing my relief, at that time, I still planned on allowing the investigation to run its course, and to remain in the Marine Corps without further statements.

But after my relief, when I got home and back on my social media, I saw a post from my old commanding officer Colonel Hobbs. He commented below my statement on LinkedIn that I didn't plan to resign and stated, "If Stuart Scheller were honorable, he would resign." This comment devastated me. He didn't call me. He didn't text me. He didn't email me. Someone who I even stated in my second video, "That I loved like a father." He demonstrated that he didn't care about me at all. And even though he's retired, Colonel Hobbs is still very active in the Marine Corps. In fact, he called after my second

video and left me a voicemail stating that he and General Neller were discussing my situation. That's the influence Col Hobbs still has.

After reading his comment following my relief, my thoughts went from disappointment to anger. It was the first time I started thinking about resigning. I started thinking, if my call for accountability can result in me being fired and investigated in 24 hours, and my greatest mentor in the Marine Corps can immediately turn on me without any empathy for me as a human being, maybe my senior leaders don't care about me at all. Maybe, this is not an organization that I want to be a part of. This led me to my second post on Friday the 27th, where I stated, "Last night when I posted the video I immediately had multiple Marines call and ask me to take down the post. 'We all agree with you Stu, but nothing will change, and it will come at a huge personal cost to you.' Now that I've had time to process... I'll offer this... we can't ALL be wrong. If you all agree... then step up. They only have the power because we allow it. What if we all demanded accountability? Every generation needs a revolution."

This post is where the Marine Corps and I started parting ways dramatically. My calls for revolution were always about changing the system. A system that centralizes power and fails to hold senior leaders accountable. A system that will immediately turn on you if you speak out.

Col Emmel called me that Friday night and made it very clear that I was heading towards legal action with the most recent post and reminded me again of the social media policy.

So I took Saturday to contemplate my situation. In that day I came to the conclusion that the Marine Corps didn't really care about me, and that best case, I would be hidden in an office for three years as a failure. But that most likely I was heading towards a BOI for separation based on my use of the word revolution. This situation led me into the second video that I posted on Sunday August 29th. The second video was me declaring that I felt like the General Officers and leaders of the military didn't understand or care. In the video I stated my intention to resign and give up my retirement. I also stated, "I want to be clear that I love the Marine Corps." And then I went on to state, "Follow me and we will bring the whole fucking system down." If I could go back, I would have chosen different words. But at no time was that a call to violence. I was stating that the system is broken and needs to be rebuilt.

Following the post of the second video, that Sunday afternoon my CO texted me to call him. Immediately after he texted me, the SOI XO called me. I answered his call and spoke to him for over ten minutes. He obviously thought I was suicidal, which I knew I wasn't. He kept stating that he would come meet me, and I kept stating that it wasn't necessary. We repeated the same thing over and over to each other until finally I got frustrated and said, "That's enough. I answered your call out of professional courtesy. I am not suicidal. And I'm not going to

continue having this conversation.” And then the phone call ended. I didn’t call Col Emmel back because I had just spoken to his XO for a great length of time, and I assumed that was sufficient.

I kept my phone on for the rest of the day and no one called me until later that night. Two Marines I know, Major Cummings and LtCol Helminski texted me that NCIS arrived at their houses respectively. Both told me NCIS was looking for me. To which I responded, “Why didn’t they just call me and ask where I was?” They didn’t know. So I told both of them the same thing, “I’m fine, and I can talk to NCIS tomorrow morning at 08:00 when I show up to work. I am not suicidal.” Then I saw a statement released by the Marine Corps public affairs office that stated, “the Marine Corps is trying to locate LtCol Scheller to ensure his safety and the safety of those around him.” I was furious about this statement. I assumed if the Marine Corps was REALLY trying to locate me, that they would have been smart enough to call me. The SOI XO was able to reach me. My peers were able to reach me. This seemed like an obvious attempt from the Marine Corps to paint me as suicidal. Which was another indicator to me that the system didn’t really care about me, but only wanted to protect itself. If they really thought I was suicidal... why not call me... unless they were actually hoping I would commit suicide.

When I went into work the next morning the Marine Corps narrative of my unstable mental health continued to be discussed. My CO told me he wanted me to volunteer for a

mental evaluation. I told him that wasn't necessary. So he ordered me to get a mental health evaluation. I did, and they determined what I knew all along, which I wasn't mentally unstable, just very angry at what I perceived to be consistent betrayal.

The mental health angle is frustrating for many reasons. The Marine Corps never ordered me to get a mental health evaluation when I missed the birth of my first child while deployed to Afghanistan. The Marine Corps never ordered me to get a mental health evaluation when I missed the funerals of all three of my grandparents while on different deployments. The Marine Corps only cared about my mental health once I publicly challenged the leadership.

After I was released from the hospital, I felt like all bets were off. I felt like the Marine Corps was out to get me, and I didn't feel like a single officer or previous peer had my back. Just reference the comments about me in the investigation. They called me, "arrogant, narcissistic, egotistical, entitled, too relaxed, abusive, bi-polar, poor selection to battalion command, treats people like shit, embellished combat record, smirks unnecessarily, supports January 6th attacks, should go to jail, etc." No one said anything positive. Not one. While at this time I hadn't actually read the investigation, I could feel their contempt in every conversation.

Also, at this time my family was out of state and my marriage was falling apart. All I wanted to do was to travel up to my wife

and try to make amends. I asked Col Emmel for leave, but he wouldn't allow it until all my medial and out-processing administration was done. He said my number one priority should be preparing to exit the Marine Corps, and all other things could wait. So I had to continue to come into work every day, which in my opinion, was never about my best interest.

The following day, on Tuesday, August 31st, I submitted my resignation letter because I knew the divide between the Marine Corps and myself was too deep for repair.

The next day, Wednesday September 1st, I made four posts that I later deleted. Two were directly to General Berger; in one post I stated that I heard General Burger was trying to court martial me. I then went on to comment about his current initiative to revoke the authority of Battalion Commander's to manage their unit's social media. To me this was an example of the system centralizing control. In a second post to General Berger, I thanked him for addressing the need to discuss the withdraw of Afghanistan. A third post I made that day was in response to the attack on my small business. I spoke to my business partner who told me MCCS was potentially pulling my product, The Perfect Ribbon, off the shelves of the Marine Corps exchanges because of my actions. Again, this was just another example of how I thought the Marine Corps was unlawfully attacking me. Again I thought, why would they do that if they actually cared about me? My fourth post that day was to my wife. She wasn't answering my phone calls. I wasn't able to take leave, and even though I knew she had taken down

her social media, I knew my plea to her would be forwarded. But in hindsight, I shouldn't have made any of those posts. So I ended up deleting all four posts from that Wednesday. I concluded that I was under duress and that the posts didn't accurately reflect my message. I also deeply regret the way I handled what should have been a private conversation with my wife.

But I never went back and deleted my messages demanding accountability, or how I thought the system was failing. I made another post on Thursday 2 September clarifying my position and demand for accountability. I very clearly stated that "I planned to bring the whole system down... in a constitutional manner with one loud voice."

At this point, I felt the world was against me, and all I could see was the hypocrisy of the system. Everything I thought about frustrated me. So I made another post on Labor Day that quoted the right in the Declaration of Independence for the people to throw off the old form of government if it isn't serving the interests of the people. I also illustrated my frustration with General officers who take jobs with high paying government contractors following their retirement. This seemed highly unethical to me, and I thought was another symptom of our inability to hold senior leaders accountable. For example, the I knew the current Secretary of Defense got a high paying job with Raytheon to be on the board of directors following his military retirement, which in itself I thought was unethical. But then he was selected to become the Secretary of

Defense. Again, I thought the ethical issues with this conflict of interest were obvious.

Later that week, on Friday September 10th, I published a third video titled United WE stand. In this video I was trying to communicate my emotional process. I was trying to show all the people who kept calling me crazy that I was just a normal guy, like all other Service members asked to kill people in the last 20 years. I wanted to normalize the psychological impact on service members after a failed war. I wanted other Service Members to see that it's normal to get mad. And that just because you're mad, doesn't mean you're bi-polar or have a mental illness. That it's normal to cry. That it's normal to question why your government asked you to commit violence. That it's normal to demand accountability from the same senior leaders who asked you to commit the violence. At no time in that video did I state I was going to use violence to hold my senior leaders accountable. But again, that is how the message was spun. I posted the video to demonstrate how these emotions are normal, but somehow I was painted as even crazier than before. Everyone was telling me that I was having a mental break down.

Following this video my lawyer was trying to make a deal. But at the time, I felt like my honor and reputation were at stake. I felt the Marine Corps was challenging me without addressing my demands for accountability... AT ALL. I felt like at that point, if I had taken any agreed upon deal, I would

always have been painted as the stereotypical crazy veteran. I felt like all my very valid points would have been forgotten.

And to be clear, I am a command selected Battalion Commander. Can you imagine a LCpl demanding accountability for rape or any other valid complaint? How do you think the command would treat those Marines? Do you think the command would be more sympathetic to them than how they have treated me? This whole process, in my opinion, should be a case study on how the system can turn on someone who speaks out. I truly hope going forward that Marine Corps leaders can better tolerate challenges to the system.

I ended up deciding to post a fourth video, on Thursday September 16th, to ensure my requests for accountability were not forgotten. I posted the video in my uniform, because unlike my previous two videos, I was very controlled and deliberate in the fourth video. In the fourth video, I was speaking directly to the General officers. I also stated my intention to prefer legal charges against General McKenzie so that my command, who was trying to hold me accountable, would also be forced to take a formal position on the charges I levied against General McKenzie. But up to this point, they have denied me this right.

After I posted the fourth video, my command finally grew tired of reminding me about the social media policy and issued me the gag order. To be clear, I never stated that I would stop posting. I only signed and acknowledge that Col Emmel gave me a gag order. After signing, I remained silent for the rest of

the week on social media. During that week I was fighting four separate legal battles with four different groups of lawyers. My wife handed me a separation agreement, my business partner initiated a process to buy me out of the company since my name hurt the brand, I was trying unsuccessfully to prefer legal action against General McKenzie, and I was also trying to defend myself against the legal actions being brought towards me by the command. It was a tough week for me personally and professionally.

Then that weekend, on Saturday, September 25th, I deliberately made three posts that violated the gag order. I did so willingly. I knew if I said true things that were hard to hear, my command would likely overreact and send me to jail. I felt this overreaction would ultimately bring coverage to my situation and force the General officers to answer tough questions about the hypocrisy of our situations.

But even though I anticipated my command would send me to jail, when I went into work on Monday, I was very disturbed that Col Emmel stated on the confinement order that I was a flight risk. Up to that point, I knew Col Emmel was very upset with me, but I didn't take it personally. I also sympathized with his responsibility to hold the party line. But when he stated formally that I was a flight risk with absolutely no evidence of this, I felt like he lied to silence and punish me. The truth is that I came into work every day and had responded to every request even after he refused to let me take leave. The only time I failed to communicate with him was the one text he sent me

after my second video, which again, I felt was appropriately addressed after I spoke to his XO for ten minutes. Yet still somehow, he listed on a formal document that I was a flight risk to justify my confinement.

While in the brig I again tried to submit a resignation in lieu of trial, but my command rejected it. They wanted a conviction of guilt. Thus, I obviously signed a deal to plead guilty to a litany of charges at special court martial, which brings us to today. But the attacks from the Marine Corps continued even after my release. Following my release, the Marine Corps leaked confidential documents to the senior pentagon journalist for Task and Purpose. Of note, the Marine Corps placed my medical records in the investigation, and then leaked these documents to Task and Purpose. For them to leak my medical records is truly heartbreaking. Furthermore, had I leaked something to the media, I would have gone back to jail. But no one in the Marine Corps will be held accountable for the leaked documents. In the article ran by Task and Purpose, I was painted as a violent extremist, Fascist, and the journalist even made a connection to Hitler. Obviously, you can understand that I was very angry following the article. After everything I've been through, I feel it's reasonable to conclude that the Marine Corps and Task and Purpose were working together in an effort to smear my name. I also feel that it's possible the Marine Corps was trying to bait me into posting again.

This is not the America I know. This is not the America that I have fought so hard to defend the last 17 years.

In summary, I was never charged with a false official statement. Because everything I have said was true. If the Marine Corps could have charged me with false official statement, they would have. My statements all center around the fact that I did not believe General Officers were held to the same standards as junior leaders. I also believed, that similar to post Vietnam, the Marine Corps leadership was trying to spin the narrative about our failures on the junior officers and enlisted without taking a hard look at themselves. I also believed that once I spoke out, the Marine Corps wholistically took every opportunity to attack me, and never actually cared about my well-being.

But it's hard for the Marine Corps to defeat someone who refuses to quit. Going forward, I am still demanding accountability from my senior General officers. Since this endeavor began, not a single General officer has accepted accountability. Not a single General officer has contacted me directly in any forum to deescalate the situation. Since this endeavor began, I have acknowledged that I should be held accountable for my actions. I am standing here today pleading guilty. This is me accepting accountability. But it deeply pains me that my senior leaders are incapable of being as courageous.

Without accountability from our senior leaders, the system cannot evolve, and the military will ultimately keep repeating the same mistakes in the future. It doesn't matter if a SSgt squad leader is highly efficient in distributed operations if the

General officers have relegated themselves to 'yes sir' responses. We need senior leaders who possess the morale courage to push back when something doesn't make sense.

Furthermore, I understand that my process of criticism was unorthodox and not within official Marine Corps channels. I essentially requested mast in a very public setting. I acknowledge that it was potentially damaging to the Marine Corps' reputation. But I felt the conversation and need for change outweighed the potential negative bad press. I did what I did because I thought it was in the best long-term interest of the Marine Corps. I have always wanted to make the Marine Corps better. Not damage the Marine Corps. I acknowledge that my actions placed the Marine Corps in a position where they were forced to respond and couldn't quietly hide behind closed doors.

My actions were very public, and at times, very emotional. But I think the emotional rollercoaster that I went through, is what every service member in the country goes through. The only difference is that my experience was very public. And unlike the 22 Service Members a day who kill themselves, I decided a long time ago that I will never be broken. No matter the struggle... I will prevail stronger. Post Traumatic Growth. But even with that mindset, that doesn't mean I don't experience pain. That doesn't mean I don't experience depression. That doesn't mean I don't take time to cry.

If the leaders of the military actually cared about service members, and their sacrifices, all the current and previous senior leaders would engage in public discussions about the shortfalls in their decision making. Senior leaders accepting accountability would heal more service members than any other initiative. The junior service members deserve that from their leadership.

I believed General officers demonstrated they are unable or unwilling to hold themselves accountable. As a result, I believed fundamental change needed to occur in the military.

I am being held accountable for my actions. The General officers should be held accountable for their failures.

Thank You,

LtCol Stu Scheller