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**OUR MILITARY AND COAST
GUARD: GREAT
INSTITUTIONS TO SERVE...
...UNTIL THEY'RE NOT**





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Our Military and Coast Guard: Great Institutions to Serve.... ...until They're Not

That's me at my career FINI flight – the last lap around the flag pole I made in a military aircraft. I chose this picture for this article because it embodies the duality of emotions not only in that moment, but also those surrounding the end of my 26-year journey: celebrating a very successful career in the military, and also celebrating the fact I was leaving it.

There is a phenomenon in the Daniel Kahneman's *pièce de résistance* "Thinking Fast and Slow" which he coined What You See Is All There Is (WYSIATI). Simply put, there is the cognitive disconnect that some of us experience best encapsulated by the adage: "if I don't see it, it must not exist." It is very similar to the phenomenon of object permanence which babies struggle with in their early years: "Oh my god, I don't see my mom any more – she must no longer exist, this upsets me greatly! Ahh, phew... she's back in my field of vision, she must exist again...". And I bring this up at the outset because many of the retorts I read to our pieces about the decay of our military and Coast Guard go along the same lines – "You talk about all this bad stuff in our uniformed services, but *I* never saw any of it... (so clearly it couldn't possibly exist)". And if you are one of those blind disciples that refuses to believe in the seedy underbelly of our DoD and Coast Guard institutions, you can probably set this article down now and go about your blissfully ignorant day...

For the remaining enlightened ones, let us continue...

When I was considering going into the airline industry after my military career, I talked with quite a few people already in it. The most pithy quote, which I roughly plagiarized for the title, was simply this: "The airlines are great!...until they're not..."



It's really a fitting quote because the fickle industry which is our national airlines is oftentimes a tale of feast or famine. When Americans are traveling, they're really traveling, which equates to big profits, lots of hiring, and big paychecks. And then come bankruptcies, and real estate bubbles, and COVID and, and, and quickly the Xanadu turns into economic doldrums as Americans' tighten their belts – one of the first victims of their reduced expenditures being travel.

Service in our military and Coast Guard are very similar: it's great. Until it's not.

I would understand if you've read our DoD Times (Redacted) series that you may think we are all gloom and doom when it comes to our DoD, but we really aren't! I am eternally thankful for the opportunities and experiences the military afforded me. Our glass-eternally-half-full COO, Francesca Graham, still sings the praises of her alma mater somewhere in New York, and will routinely chant her paratrooper "All the Way!" for reasons beyond me. We sincerely would not have traded in the high points of our careers for anything. From my perspective, those high points were incredible: I flew the F-16 twice the speed of sound, served 14 years abroad, was taught German and Italian, lived for two years in Hamburg studying with the Bundeswehr, was an Air Attaché living in Rome and working in Switzerland. I mean, I still drool a little just thinking about all of this. And yet, here I am, Founder and President of the Walk the Talk Foundation, consistently discussing and highlighting so much of what is wrong with our military...what's up with that!?

It's at this point, we need to discuss how the divorce happened.

You see, I was afforded all those above opportunities because, aside from pure luck and timing, I was consistently in the good graces of the institution. I did all my X-hundred additional duties like a good soldier, I filled all the educational squares including our nonsensical PMEs, I ingratiated myself with my bosses, I saved millions and millions of dollars (as stated on nearly every OPR). In the military's eyes, I was a superstar. And then...I looked at the military cross-eyed and the downfall was as swift as it was permanent. In a future episode of the Star Chamber, we will delve into some psychology behind this, but I will likely forever ascribe to this hypothesis we at the Foundation have developed:



For a member of our uniformed services to file a complaint, or raise a concern of wrongdoing, is taken by the leadership of the institution as questioning their authority and/or the sanctity of the institution. The response is almost always swift and unforgiving.

We arrived at this theory because of the response we see to those raising concerns of wrong, just as I personally witnessed in my case, is to quickly circle the wagons and gaslight/discredit the complainant and/or the complaint itself. In 2019, I was in the top quartile of my officer group just as I had been in the previous two decades of service and had just been lauded by the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) for my contributions to the mission. In my 2020 Officer Performance Report from the same DIA, I was rated as being in the bottom quartile of all officers in my peer group in the Air Force.

What happened? I filed a complaint.

And after that, it was over. I was dead to the institution. All the training, and talent, and performance, and potential future contributions I would have made – poof! Gone! They couldn't get rid of the "boat rocker" fast enough.

"I thought I'd be legally protected from all this!" I said. "I thought it was my duty to report wrongdoings" I said. You silly silly naïve Lieutenant Colonel, you....

All the investment in me, the known quantity which I was, the difficulty in replacing me (given today's recruiting challenges), any future potential I had – all of it, in the military's calculus, amounted to the square root of fuck-all when pitted against an institution which was clearly far more focused on defeating me, a whistleblower, than it was defeating our foreign adversaries. I was immediately retaliated against, besmirched, defamed, libeled, slandered, and reprimanded against. I was labeled a "bad apple" a "boat rocker" a "conspirator." I had my follow-on assignment removed then my abysmal annual appraisal was rushed through without my signature.

And from that point on for the next 5 years, as I worked through IG offices and EO offices and BCMRs and Congressional caseworkers and staffers, and then started a Foundation whose helped hundreds of others work through IG offices and EO offices and BCMRs and CDIs and 15-6s and Congressional caseworkers and staffers, I saw what failures most were. I saw how the mid to upper tier of the chain of command was



burgeoning with a lot of self-servitude and flaccidity, how the “independent watchdogs” of the IG system were just the institution’s lapdog in costume, how many EO officers couldn’t discern their heads from their anuses, how the administrative system of “justice” in the military is so far removed from any semblance of American justice it’s not even in the same f’ing ZIP code, how the BCMR process is as opaque and corrupt as its pal the administrative investigative system, how a lot of Congressional staffers can’t be bothered to do more than forward emails along but at the same time are quick to thank you for your service. In short, I saw a side of the military I would have never imagined (and a side some acolytes don’t believe exists), a very real and very dysfunctional, corrupt, and malaise-ridden side to our military and its so-called “oversight” mechanisms. And through that, I came to two very blunt realizations:

- 1. Most of the so-called avenues of redress in the military and Coast Guard are a joke. The majority are thin veneers of “justice” and “due process” placed there solely to dupe what little Congressional oversight exists into thinking they serve the individual member. They don’t. They serve and protect their respective institutions and their leadership. Period.**
- 2. The military and Coast Guard are incredible places to serve. Until they’re not.**

Serve well, Americans....and Check 6!



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- ▶ Find your Representative here: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
- ▶ Find your Senator here: <https://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm>

Feel free to reach out privately at francescagraham@walkthetalkfoundation.org or in the comments.

PETITIONS: [SIGN THIS PETITION](#) demanding that our leaders in Congress change the DoD’s unjust administrative investigatory system.



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