

I have known Herbert Clayton Bollinger for nearly 25 years. We met as young men in the United States Marine Corps, in the aviation community, as AH-1W Cobra Attack Helicopter pilots. We were young, idealistic, and ready to change the world and make our statement in this life. In short, we were aiming high, as many young men and women do. We were formed in our early years by the post-Vietnam era of national reflection which culminated in our late teens and collegiate years as an era of optimism with the ending of the Cold War and a renewed sense of national pride. With this shared foundational beginning Clay's path crossed with mine for the first time as young Officers in the USMC. What began as a professional relationship soon grew into a much deeper personal friendship as it was clearly apparent that Clay's commitment to his personal growth equally matched his desire for professional success.

In the aviation community, and in particular the attack community, there is saying that 'the squadron eats its young'. On the surface it might appear harsh, but the practices in the squadron 'Ready Room' are designed to test young pilots to ensure they are adequately prepared to support their customer – the Marine on the ground in harm's way. Anything less would be a disservice. It quickly weeds out the ill-prepared and leaves behind an individual who is part of a unit that is both singular in purpose and lethal in execution. It instills in one from a young age to think of others before yourself. To put your ego in check. To be calm in the face of the unknown. To make order out of chaos. To think beyond personal fame and strive for collective success. In short, to subsume yourself in the service of others – no matter the personal cost, which could quite possibly be your life. Clay excelled in this environment.

I had the opportunity of serving as Clay's Commanding Officer for a period of time once these traits were deeply ingrained in him. It was quickly apparent that Clay's character was an embodiment of the USMC ethos of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. Honor – through his professional performance Clay earned and maintained the respect of both his subordinates and superiors. Courage - Clay did not conflate the truth – he spoke honestly, whether good news or bad. He never shirked a responsibility or failed his Marines in the face of the enemy. Commitment - Clay was dedicated to the success of the squadron and the individual personal welfare of each of his Marines. That is the professional Clay.

Personally, thus politically, Clay is driven by first principles. Through hours of conversation it is apparent that he does not allow dogma to influence his belief in the primacy of the individual and the inalienable rights attributed to the same. He is not prone to moral relativism. He will aim at the highest possible good. He will speak the truth. And he will fight to uphold the will of those he is entrusted to serve. He has proven that in the crucible of combat. He has proven that in his professional relationships. He has proven that in his personal relationships. He will prove it to his constituents.

Give him the opportunity to serve you as he has countless others before you, and you will not be disappointed. You will have the Ridgetop, TN that you want. You will be represented by a man of Honor, Courage, and Commitment who will work hard for you.

Matthew Shenberger LtCol, USMC (ret)