

## Anyone for helicopter lessons?

April 12, 2015 by Daniel J. Bauer

I had hoped to write this week on a topic guaranteed to warm the hearts of readers, and possibly win a plaudit or two for sharing a few sunny words on a recent news event. Surely I am not the only one who likes cheerful news. Most of us can probably identify with that gal in the old American musical "South Pacific." You know who I mean: the one who sings in the shower while washing her hair, and calls herself "a cockeyed optimist."

And with Beijing's antics with flight zones and campaigns to test Tibetan nuns and monks for political loyalty these days, and with our local draught and threats of water-rationing, I thought a shot of cockeyed optimism might be what we all need.

But then, along came an unexpected news story. Along came a TV personality's naïve posting of incredible photographs on Facebook. Along came knowledge of new names. You see, before the helicopter brouhaha, I'm afraid I did not even know who Janet Lee is. I know now.

And imagine, I thought "Apache" marked the name of a tribe of indigenous Americans, what we once loosely called "Indians." Didn't the Apaches appear in many a good western story or film and, as a matter of fact, around the time "South Pacific" was the hottest play on Broadway? I somehow seem to recall that an American automobile manufacturer named one of its truck models after the tribe. Maybe I am imagining that. Still, if there isn't yet a truck called an Apache, there ought to be. The name sure has done a lot for the helicopter business. There just seems so much to learn these days, and all of it in a hurry. Well, at least I now know an Apache is a helicopter, an attack helicopter, a very expensive attack helicopter.

My assumption is that it is not necessary to go too deeply into the story, to tell it all over again, and so on. We've heard enough about the obviously ill-advised visits to admire the most flashy and trendy of military equipment. We're sick of pictures of a military official cavorting at a Halloween party with an unusual helmet on his head. We've had all we can stomach of politicians and the highest of military officials fuming and fussing and fulminating. Despite our better selves, we'd like not to know about children dashing hither and yon, and playing Simon Says and Kick the Can in an equipment hanger that is supposed to be off limits to John Q. Public.

I haven't mentioned possible violations of law as pertaining to migrant workers and caretakers. Enough, already, I agree. Still, I am thinking of the question made famous by the hopeful little boy who found a mound of manure under his Christmas tree. I'd like to ask, "Is there a pony hiding beneath all this horse crao? In other words, is there anything we can learn from this sad soap opera?"

Lesson # 1 - - Some jobs in life are of course more important in themselves than we are as individuals. Such types of work are positions in life. They are always larger than we are personally. This story has caused an international loss of face for Taiwan, and made a laughing stock of our military, its sense of discipline, and its methods of evaluation and promotion. Many of us work within the framework of institutions. We may not be in the military, but we belong to something. For better or worse, our small, seemingly insignificant actions may radically affect the greater whole.

Lesson # 2 - - Many of us walk a thin line between what we owe to the world and what we imagine we are entitled to claim for our own pleasure, prestige or comfort. Put simply, whoever paraded their influence to win for civilians access to equipment and areas reserved for official use were drunk on an overdose of egotism. They were high on the fumes of their own hubris. People inebriated with themselves are susceptible to incendiary crashes, and the Apache scandal is an obvious example.

Lesson # 3 - - We may not be able to admit it, but for all practical purposes, high-technology has become the idol of our times. We hand over to "divinities" in our religions a tremendous amount of faith and devotion. We worship whatever we believe is divine. Is not the Apache scandal at least partly a story of characters who got down on their knees, figuratively speaking, and bowed their heads in a type of misplaced worship? That sounds whacky, I admit, but I think it happened.

The magic of all that computer related wizardry in the helmets and cabin of the Great Apache from Above seems to have so bedazzled well trained, but all too human military officers that they lost a grip on basic common sense. That happens when any of us worship the wrong things in life. (*Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.*)

## Talking points

- 1) It is amazing how the Taiwan media have focused on the Apache helicopter 'tour' for the TV personality Janet Lee. 3 weeks after the event, newspapers are still carrying reports and strong criticism of the incident. Why do you think this 'news event' is so hot? Should people be angry? Is the helicopter incident so important?
- 2) One newspaper said in an editorial that some soldiers in Taiwan appear to make a "cosplay activity" out of military uniforms and equipment. The high ranking military officer here who "borrowed" an expensive computer-related helicopter flying helmet for his children's Halloween party has been severely criticized. How do you feel about his behavior?
- 3) The writer of column is a foreigner. Should a foreigner in Taiwan be openly critical of this country's military leaders? Is it right to speak out loud and directly about highly ranked persons in positions of authority, or should we stay quiet with negative opinions?

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