

# SHINSEKI: NO TRIAL BALLOONS

Athenae, always the wordsmith, captures the beauty of the Eric Shinseki pick to lead Veterans Affairs.

## *Obama To Bush*

"How would you like to SUCK MY BALLS?"

Spencer, writing with the seriousness and respect Shinseki deserves, has more.

To say this is an inspired choice underscores its magnitude. Shinseki's personal courage and virtue are close to unparalleled in the current generation of general officers. He knows the sacrifices of war personally, as he left part of his right foot in Vietnam. The new generation of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans – already underserved by the country that sent them to war – can know that he has their backs. After all, before the war began, he all but ended his career (Rumsfeld had announced his successor months before after they feuded over the Crusader artillery system) by telling Congress that the indefinite occupation of Iraq would require hundreds of thousands of troops to keep the peace, far beyond the antiseptic and now-discredited estimates of the Bush administration. At his retirement ceremony, Shinseki gave a prescient and impassioned speech imploring the Pentagon to "beware a 12-division strategy for a 10-division Army."

Last year, an exemplary soldier named Paul Yingling wrote a scathing essay indicting the generals who acquiesced to the Bush administration's inadequate

plans for the occupation. It was titled "A Failure in Generalship." Yingling accused the current generation of generals of cowardice, egotism, careerism and dereliction of duty, putting self-interested deference to the administration before integrity, intellectual honesty and service to both the frontline soldier, sailor, airman and marine and the country itself. Ric Shinseki was the man who stood against this unfortunate trend, and he paid for his integrity with his career. To see him vindicated is to witness a proud moment in American history.

But there's one more point I'd like to make.

Perhaps it's because I'm not tied into veterans circles (so it may be that I've just missed it), but this is the first major nomination Obama has made for which he hasn't first sent out a trial balloon: Chief of Staff, Treasury, State, DNI, even Commerce. Even at AG, DHS, and NSA, there were public discussions about who he would pick ahead of time.

This time around, the news didn't get out until the Saturday evening before Obama went on MTP to announce it, at a time when the choice was already made.

That does two things. First, it focuses attention on Obama's timing: the anniversary of Pearl Harbor.

More deliciously, if you're going to say "suck my balls" to someone, including the element of surprise really adds to the effect.